

# Development of an Institutionalised Riot System in Meerut City, 1961 to 1982

*Meerut city in Uttar Pradesh has been a site of endemic Hindu-Muslim riots since before independence. In an attempt to explain the 'institutionalised systems of riot production (IRS)' that are first created and then activated during periods of political mobilisation or at the time of elections, this article focuses on two riots in Meerut that occurred in post-independence India and were divided by a gap of 20 years. The 1961 riot is posed as a benchmark to contrast with later communal events of 1982, to illustrate the changes – more intense and deadly – that took place in the intervening period and to explain how and why these changes took place.*

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In many parts of India where Hindu-Muslim riots are endemic, especially in the northern and western states, institutionalised systems of riot production (IRS) have been created in the years since independence, which are activated during periods of political mobilisation or at the time of elections. Far from being spontaneous occurrences, the production of such riots involves calculated and deliberate actions by key individuals, the conveying of messages, recruitment of participants, and other specific types of activities, especially provocative ones, that are part of a performative repertoire. Moreover, all these actions may require frequent rehearsals until the time is ripe, the context is felicitous, and there are no serious obstructions in carrying out the performance.

That Meerut has been in the past a site of endemic Hindu-Muslim riots is clear enough from the list of such events shown in Table 1. Serious riots, that is to say riots with deaths, have occurred in Meerut city since before independence – in 1939 and 1946 – and after independence in 1961, 1968, 1973, 1982, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990 and 1991.<sup>1</sup> Although no major riots have occurred in Meerut city since 1990, I have confirmed in recent visits to the city (January 2004) that an IRS continues to function and could be activated in future. However, this article will focus on the riots of 1961 and 1982, leaving the other riots and an explanation for the current dormancy of the IRS for analysis in later publications.

While my last book,<sup>2</sup> which focuses on the history of riot production in the town of Aligarh, has been, for the most part, favourably received so far, legitimate issues have been raised concerning whether or not one can infer from the mere frequency of riots at a particular site the presence of an IRS and, secondly, whether the frequency of such riots in the past is a predictor of future riots.<sup>3</sup> A third issue has arisen as a consequence of the argument presented in the work of Ashutosh Varshney concerning the critical importance of what he calls 'civic engagement' in riot prevention and the absence thereof as equally important in explaining the occurrence of riots.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the first two issues, I have first to clarify my position as follows. The mere frequency of riots at a particular

site does, to my mind, warrant the inference that a system of riot production exists, but does not prove its existence. The latter must be demonstrated. Quantitative, statistical analyses cannot demonstrate the existence of a dynamic process. The latter can be revealed fully only by ethnographic research. Press reports and other documentary sources may also be useful in providing evidence for or against the existence of an IRS. The primary scientific value of the discovery of the importance of the IRS as an explanatory factor in the production of riots is that it directs attention away from spurious explanations of riot occurrences, particularly those that argue that they are spontaneous occurrences arising out of historical animosities between peoples. But, the discovery also has policy implications since it demands that attention be paid to the actual instigators and perpetrators of acts of collective violence that everywhere have for far too long and far too often gone unrecognised and unpunished.

With regard to the second question, Wilkinson's data have identified previous frequency of riots as a significant explanatory variable in riot production.<sup>5</sup> But, it certainly does not have universal power. One important reason that it does not have higher explanatory power is that local conditions that have provided the context for the creation of an IRS may change over time, placing the activation of the riot system in dormancy or, rather, to use my own metaphorical terminology, reducing it to the rehearsal phase, but not eliminating it from the site, thereby ensuring its availability if and when the political context changes.

With regard to the issue of the critical importance of civic engagement, that is, the existence or absence of interreligious associations and interpersonal relations, I have found this argument of little value. It has neither statistical nor persuasive ethnographic support.<sup>6</sup> Most important, my research demonstrates that, even where elements of civic engagement do exist in civil society in India, they cannot withstand the power of political movements and forces that seek to create intercommunal violence. I believe that what is true for India is true elsewhere as well. Therefore, from a policy point of view, it is a pure

diversion to invest resources in promoting civic engagement, when attention and resources should be directed towards uncovering the system and process of riot production and the producers thereof.

In the remainder of this article, I will provide ethnographic evidence to support my arguments on these three issues primarily from my own original research in Meerut between the years 1983 and 2004.<sup>7</sup> This article discusses only two of these riots, those of 1961 and 1982. I use the 1961 riots as a kind of benchmark to contrast with the later riots, to illustrate the changes that took place in the intervening period in their intensity and deadliness, and to explain how and why those changes have taken place.

### Riots of October 1961

The Meerut riots of October 1961, which were enacted on October 5 to 8, followed two days after the Aligarh riots of October 1 to 3 in which 15 people were reported to have been killed. The Meerut riots were almost equally deadly. Thirteen people were reported killed during these days and one other person was killed on October 11 during curfew relaxation, bringing the reported death toll to 14. Riots occurred as well during this month in 13 other cities and towns in western Uttar Pradesh (UP), but did not extend further to other parts of the state. These western UP riots occurred four months before the third general elections. The Congress was the ruling party in Delhi and in the state as well as the dominant party in Aligarh city and Meerut city.

The communal composition of the populations of Aligarh and Meerut cities were roughly similar. Hindus and others constituted a majority in both towns, comprising 55 per cent and 58 per cent of the total respectively, compared to Muslims with 35 per cent and 37 per cent.

The home minister of the state government, responsible for law and order, was Chaudhuri Charan Singh, who took a hard stand against the communal riots in Meerut and elsewhere; he instructed the district magistrates to take firm action and sent police reinforcements to Meerut. On October 8, additional forces were also sent to Meerut from both the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the army, as they had been previously sent to Aligarh as well.<sup>8</sup>

### Origins of the Meerut Riot System: An Eyewitness Account

Among the myths associated with Hindu-Muslim and other types of interreligious and interethnic riots is that they are ignited by a spark at one site after which the flame then spreads to other sites, or it is said that they occur like viral infections that also spread from place to place. One of the most striking elements uncovered in my interviewing and in the documentary evidence was that there was, in fact, a direct connection between the riots in Aligarh and Meerut. But the connection between the two appears to have been neither igneous nor viral. The account below is based primarily on a single interview with a person who was eyewitness to some of the events. The interview was conducted in 1983, 22 years after the events, so we cannot imagine it to be an entirely accurate rendering even of what he saw and experienced at that time. It is clear from his account, however, that he saw a great deal and that the memory of it constituted what Hume has called 'a vivid impression' in his mind that never left his consciousness. A descendant of one of the greatest Muslim

zamindar families of Meerut district, that of the Nawab of Sardhana, he was at the time of the interview an advocate in the Meerut city court. I contrast below his account with the reports that appeared in *The Times of India* on this riot. The newspaper accounts, for their part, are quite unreliable. They are also partial, in the sense of being fragmented, often incoherent, full of errors, and, obviously, are heavily based upon police reports rather than eyewitness accounts. None of *The Times of India* reports on the Meerut riots were signed by a correspondent.

The pretext for the riot in Aligarh was the severe beating of one Iqbal Singh, and two or three other Hindu boys, by Muslim students, in the aftermath of a contentious Aligarh Muslim University Students' Union election. *The Times of India* reported on October 8 (but with no dateline) that Iqbal Singh and a Muslim student, "whose quarrel sparked off the incidents", had been expelled from the university and that Iqbal Singh had also "been taken into custody in connection with a stabbing incident".<sup>9</sup> However, my informant recalled that Iqbal Singh, whose father, Balbir Singh, happened to be the station officer in the central police station (kotwal) in Meerut city, proceeded thereafter to Meerut, where he was said to have "contacted some nasty elements of Meerut College and Nanak Chand Anglo-Sanskrit College". By nasty elements, my informant meant 'communal'. Meerut College, precursor of the current Meerut University, would have comprised both Hindu and Muslim students, but the Nanak Chand College was 'Hindu', that is, attended and run mostly or entirely by Hindus.

**Table 1: Riots and Riot Deaths in Meerut City, 1939 to 1990**

Date	Official Death Toll <sup>a</sup>	Unofficial Estimates
1939 (October 2)	8	
1946 (November 7-11)	29	
Pre-independence total	37	
1961 (October 5-8)	14	17 <sup>b</sup>
1968 (January 28-30)	13	17 <sup>c</sup>
1973 (December 11)	7	
1982 (September 7-11; 29-30 – October 1)	42 <sup>d</sup>	85 <sup>e</sup>
1986 (March 1)	3	
1987 (April-July)	136 <sup>f</sup>	1639/329 <sup>h</sup>
1989 (August 11)	1	
1990 (September 22)	1	
1990 (November 2-3)	12	16 <sup>i</sup>
1990 (December 12-13)	1	4 <sup>j</sup>
1991 (May 20)	32	
1991 (June 12)	1	
Post-independence total	263	
Grand total	290	

- Notes: a Figures are from the Varshney-Wilkinson dataset derived from *The Times of India*, kindly provided to me by Steven Wilkinson.  
 b Interview with Tanzim Ali Shah, in Meerut, August 18, 1983.  
 c Of which 16 were Muslims, one Hindu 'killed due to mistaken identity', according to Aswini K Ray and Subhash Chakravarti, 'Meerut Riots: A Case Study', Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, New Delhi, nd, 1968?, p 11.  
 d Wilkinson's dataset divides this long period of violence in Meerut into two separate riots, for which he gives the figure of 11 dead in the first, 31 in the second.  
 e S A A Sabzwari, 'Meerut in Law Court', Meerut, 1983.  
 f Wilkinson's dataset gives death tolls in 1987 on 7 different dates; I have combined them all into one figure.  
 g 'Muslim India 73', January 1989, p 18, citing Kuldeep Nayar in *Sunday Observer*, November 27, 1988.  
 h Muslim Advocate's Council, 'An Objective Study of 1987 Meerut Riots to Assess, How Deep is the Injury? and What Loss the Country Suffered?', Meerut, 1989, pp A-1 to A-23.  
 i *TOI*, November 3 and 4.  
 j 'Muslim India 98', February 1991, p 78.

The newspaper account and that of my informant cannot be reconciled if Iqbal Singh remained in custody in Aligarh when the rioting began in Meerut. It is, however, quite possible that Iqbal Singh, son of a station officer, was released from custody promptly and that he did indeed proceed to Meerut thereafter, as my informant recalled. In either case, there is a stark difference between my informant's account of the beginnings of the riot and the igneous and viral accounts favoured by the press. The first *The Times of India* report on the Meerut riot, datelined October 6, says simply that "communal disturbances... flared up". It also mentions that, among two persons killed and 13 injured, one of the persons injured was "Balbir Singh, City Kotwal (station officer)".<sup>10</sup> The report does not mention that Balbir Singh was Iqbal Singh's father. According to my informant's account, however, the first action in Meerut is the arrival of Iqbal Singh, an angry young man bent on revenge for his humiliation at the hands of Muslim boys at the AMU. This revenge is not to be taken against the actual perpetrators of his beating, but against any Muslim students, or Muslims in general, who can be found in a vulnerable position in a city some distance from the site of his beating. In Aligarh itself, messages had already been sent to the Hindu colleges there, from which the boys set out to take revenge against the Muslims at the university, and after which rioting took place in the city as well. Now, the scene has moved only two or three days later to Meerut city, the action here is said to have begun in a similar manner by Hindu boys from the local colleges who, in the next step, having been contacted and aroused by Iqbal Singh, set out in a procession, with the latter at its head, towards an old Muslim Inter College there, named Faiz-e-Aam.

At this point, my eyewitness arrived upon the scene, an advocate in black court dress on his way to the courts, where he "found a procession of about a hundred or a hundred and fifty persons", led by Iqbal Singh, which had moved out from Meerut College, on the outskirts of the city, across the 'nala' (drain) and the bridge (Begum Bridge), leading into the centre of the city, and heard its participants saying that they were on their way to the Muslim Inter College, of which he happened to be assistant manager. He heard the processionists say: 'Faiz-e-Aam ki taraf chalna hai, Faiz-e-Aam ki taraf. Faiz-e-Aam walon ko dekhna hai' (Let's go to Faiz-e-Aam, to Faiz-e-Aam. Let's look for those Faiz-e-Aam fellows). My eyewitness then called the manager, the Nawab of Baghpat, alerted him to the procession, and advised him to close the college, which the latter promptly did. Along the way to Faiz-e-Aam, the students passed through Khair Nagar and Jali Kothi where the largest Muslim-owned industrial enterprise (manufacturer of brass bands) of the city was located. The owners ordered the gates closed, the processionists tossed some objects at the factory, then passed on towards Faiz-e-Aam. Finding the college closed, they did as much damage as they could, throwing stones, breaking windows, and setting fire to furniture. Along their route, they also attacked Muslim-owned shops.

Our eyewitness also noticed, 'strange to mention', as he put it, that there were some quite prominent Congressmen in the procession, one of whom was editor and publisher of a Hindi newspaper. Also, "strangely enough, the city magistrate and the city deputy superintendent of police (SP)" were also "with the procession". When the latter were accosted by 'some people' and berated for allowing this vandalism to occur under their eyes, they replied that the students were just enjoying themselves and that they were allowing them to pass, for if the authorities made 'a show of force', there would be 'a greater riot'.

Let us pause here once again to consider how far there is spontaneity in this procession. Its participants have been deliberately recruited, it is led by persons who are directing it towards Muslim institutions, it is accompanied by prominent politicians of the ruling party and newspapermen, and the police are present. The gates of the targeted institutions are closed, so the students have fun in damaging, burning, and destroying Muslim property. The crowd was also relatively small at this point.

Contrary to the police argument that indulgence would prevent a larger riot, quite the opposite ensued. The next day, according to our eyewitness, as he was returning from the courts, again in his black court uniform, he "was told that another *bigger* (emphasis in original) procession of about 1,000 or more have assembled," coming from the Burhana Gate, again towards Jali Kothi and Khair Nagar, to attack Muslim shops and other properties. On this occasion, he rushed to the house of a Muslim Congressman, Shaukat Hameed Khan, from a very prominent Congress Muslim political family of Meerut district, who was at the time seeking the Congress nomination for the upcoming legislative assembly elections from the rural constituency of Baghpat. Other people came at the same time to see Shaukat Hameed to plead with him to take some action. Failing to reach the authorities by telephone, he then proposed that they all go to meet the procession, saying, "There must be some people who(m) we know. We know so many, we have got so many friends from *Amaru Srajjan Sangeet* [?]<sup>11</sup> and Hindu Mahasabhis and all, let us say, 'What is all this, *bhai* (brother)? They had – the students had a fight there, at Aligarh, you had your – I mean, demonstration yesterday; what are you going to do?' and all."

In other words, these prominent Muslim politicians and professional people, all Congressmen, were setting out to appeal to their Hindu compatriots, including militant Hindus as indicated in the reference to 'Hindu Mahasabhis', and, as the situation developed, to try and appease their own Muslim brethren. For when they arrived at the site, a crossing where Hindu and Muslim mohallas and their populations are mixed and juxtaposed, they found an extremely dangerous situation. In anticipation of the imminent arrival of the processionists, large crowds of Muslims had rushed out from their 'galis' (alleyways), with lathis (bamboo sticks, often metal-tipped) and 'ballams' (short spears), a 'leaderless' crowd saying, "We will *not* (original emphasis) allow the procession to go," and this and that.

Let us pause once more to consider the elements of spontaneity and deliberation as well as the question of so-called civic engagement. My respondent himself believed that the Muslims had come out virtually spontaneously, without leadership, acting emotionally. But I have a different interpretation of what was happening here, and what I believe has happened and continues to happen in riot situations in many other parts of the world, namely, that reports have come to the Muslim mohallas – not rumours, since the Muslims in their mohallas are being informed of exactly what is threatening them – of a large Hindu procession, accompanied by Hindu politicians (including some Hindu Congressmen) and Hindu policemen. The Muslims are indeed rushing out in response to this news, to defend their community, its property, and the lives of its members.

Second, at this early stage in the development of Meerut's institutionalised riot system, prominent, secular, nationalist persons from the Muslim community still believe that intercommunal dialogue, reasoning, and persuasion may prevent a riotous

confrontation between members of the two communities. They were, however, already out of touch with what was happening, and the extent of deliberate purpose from the militant Hindu side.

Third, the forthcoming general elections now appear plainly as part of the backdrop of the riot-in-making. Although he was seeking the nomination from a rural constituency, not from Meerut city itself, Shaukat Hamid, who had accompanied my informant to the scene at the Muslim mohalla, could not risk his political chances by placing himself in the midst of a Hindu-Muslim conflict that was about to break out in serious violence; so, suddenly my informant noticed that Shaukat Hamid had disappeared from the scene, though my informant said he was still surrounded by some Hindu friends. But, there were broader political implications of this riot for the upcoming election that will be examined further below.

But, first let us continue with this account of the actual beginning of the riot and consider further the implications. As we have seen, the processionists arrived at the Muslim quarters, along with the two most important civilian and police authorities of the district, the district magistrate and the SSP (both high caste Hindus) with, in principle, full powers to take control of the situation and undertake any action they chose. What, in fact, did they finally do? According to my informant, the Muslim crowd refused to disperse until the Hindu processionists also dispersed. The police then, instead of ordering the dispersal of both crowds, charged into the Muslim crowd with their lathis to break it up, threatened my informant with arrest if he did not immediately leave the scene himself, and the Hindu crowds then began the rioting, burning, and killing. So, we observe a riot beginning under the very noses of the two principal officers of the district, who had the powers, and could have summoned the forces necessary, to stop the processionists, but chose instead to let them attack the Muslims, as a consequence of which rioting began, extended for several days, and left at least 13 persons dead. In this sequence of events, Iqbal Singh's father, station officer of the central police station, according to my informant, played an important part.

At the end of this story, we are still far from the furious mob actions of enraged crowds. On the contrary, we have a deliberately provocative Hindu procession setting out to march through Muslim localities to intimidate and beat any Muslims who might be found obstructing their way, looting and burning Muslim shops as they pass through, under the protection of Hindu policemen. On the other side, we have crowds of Muslims who have emerged from their homes to defend themselves, their property, their localities, standing ready for a battle, if necessary. I do not see how such a situation can be called spontaneous. It is rather closer to a military battle. It is, however, different from the latter in that the ensuing actions are less disciplined, or perhaps, undisciplined. But even here, I suspect the existence of some kinds of leadership in these apparently 'leaderless' mobs.

I want to note here also that, at this early stage in the development of Meerut's IRS, we can discern elements that not only continue over the next decades, but become more extreme, though sometimes varied in their manifestations, sometimes curbed. But, most important, as will be shown in the remainder of this article, is that at each stage of major riot production, that is, when all the conditions are present for large-scale rioting to occur, further boundaries are transgressed. Those boundaries include the extent and scale of police involvement, the spatial spread of rioting, the numbers killed, the atrocities committed in the process, and,

finally, the boundaries between what social scientists define as riots and pogroms, fights and massacres, random killings and wholesale slaughter with genocidal tinges.

We can also discern at this stage a critical connection that also becomes more prominent later, between riots and politics, especially between the timing of riot production, the involvement of politicians in their production, and elections. We have already noted two types of political connections. My informant observed the involvement of militant Hindu political persons (and some Congressmen presumably with similar inclinations) among the processionists. He also drew attention to the disappearance from the scene of the action, of a Congress politician, who feared for his political future if his presence were to be noted by national Congress leaders, who would then deny him the party nomination in the next election. It is also to be stressed that attempts through civic action to prevent rioting were here overborne by deliberate political action to produce rioting, on the one hand, and fear that

**Table 2: Winning Party or Independent Candidate, Meerut City Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha, and Municipal Elections, 1952 to 1985<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Election Type	Winning Party or Independent
<i>Phase 1: Congress dominance</i>		
1952	Municipal Board <sup>b</sup>	Congress
1952	Assembly	Congress
1952	Lok Sabha	Congress
1954	Municipal Board	Congress
1957	Assembly	Congress
1957	Lok Sabha	Congress
1961	Mayoral	Congress
1962	Assembly	Congress
1962	Lok Sabha	Congress
<i>Phase 2: Congress dominance contested by two rival parties</i>		
1965	Municipal Board	Congress <sup>c</sup>
1967	Lok Sabha	SSP
1967	Assembly	Jan Sangh
1969	Assembly	Jan Sangh
1971	Lok Sabha	Congress
1974	Assembly	Jan Sangh
1977	Lok Sabha	BLD
1977	Assembly	Congress
1980	Lok Sabha	Congress (I)
1980	Assembly	Congress (I)
1982	Mayoral	NA
1984	Lok Sabha	LKD <sup>d</sup>
1985	Assembly	INC

*Notes:* a Results in Lok Sabha elections for 1962, 1980, and 1984 were for the Aligarh city segment of the parliamentary constituency only; those for 1952, 1957, 1967, 1971 and 1977 were for the entire parliamentary constituency, since the segmentwise results for those years were not available. Because the parliamentary constituency consists of five nested segments corresponding to individual legislative assembly constituencies, the winner in the parliamentary constituency as a whole may or may not have won a plurality of votes in a particular segment, in this case the Meerut city segment.

b I have assessed dominance in the municipal board according to the affiliation of the chairman of the municipal board who, in this early period was elected by the members of the board.

c The chairman of the municipal board was allied with Charan Singh, then leader of a faction in the Congress that later broke away to create a new opposition party, the BKD.

d The result for 1984 is for the Meerut city segment of the parliamentary constituency. The constituency as a whole, which includes four rural segments, was won by the Congress.

*Source:* Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha data are from the reports of the Election Commission of India and the Uttar Pradesh Election Commission. Information on the Municipal Boards comes from Nagesh Jha, *Leadership and Local Politics: A Study of Meerut District in Uttar Pradesh, 1923-1973*, Popular Prakashan, 1979, pp 41-42.

one's political future would be damaged if one sought openly to prevent one, on the other hand.

### Political Context of Riot Production

Let us now look more closely at the political context in which these riots were produced. The Congress was in power in UP. Further, as indicated in Table 2, the entire period between 1952 and 1962 in Meerut city was one of Congress dominance: in municipal, legislative assembly, and Lok Sabha elections, all of which were won by the party in this period. Moreover, in the first two post-independence legislative assembly elections, the Jan Sangh candidates polled poorly, losing their security deposits in both elections, and the party's candidate in 1957 polled fourth, with only 4.43 per cent of the vote.

As the rioting spread in Aligarh and Meerut, the chief minister and the home minister of UP declared that these riots had been organised by political parties and unnamed 'communal organisations',<sup>12</sup> with the specific purpose of taking advantage of the situation for their own political benefit. Prem Bhatia, a columnist for *The Times of India* (TOI), was certain that the riots would cause 'considerable political damage' to the Congress in the forthcoming general elections and that 'the Hindu and Muslim communal parties' would gain from them. He argued that it would greatly increase both 'the Hindu and Muslim vote against the Congress', naming the Jan Sangh as the likely chief beneficiary.<sup>13</sup> The home minister, Charan Singh, made precisely the same assessment of the situation after a five-day tour of the riot-struck towns, saying that there was definitely a political conspiracy behind the riots, which displayed 'a common pattern' in the affected towns and that the purpose was 'to discredit the Congress among the Hindu and Muslim masses with a view to capturing political power'.<sup>14</sup>

The results of the February 1962 legislative assembly elections, held only four months after the September riots, confirmed

Congress fears, though they do not prove the charges. The Congress vote declined precipitously, by approximately 20 per cent, while the Jan Sangh vote increased by approximately the same amount (Table 3). Moreover, the combined vote of the two militant Hindu candidates, from the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, was 31.40 per cent, a mere 175 votes short of the Congress total. Further points to note are, first, that both leading candidates in 1962 were Hindus, whereas the runner-up in 1957 was a Muslim member of the CPI. Second, the combined vote for the two Muslim candidates in 1962 was less than that of the sole Muslim candidate in 1957. So, the riots were followed by a diminution of the electoral strength of the Congress and an increase in that of the Jan Sangh, and probably was a direct political consequence of the riots. Further, the circumstantial evidence suggests that the riots were produced with the political complicity of the Jan Sangh and other militant Hindu elements,<sup>15</sup> with the hope that it would enhance their vote in the upcoming elections.

### Riots of 1982

I want to fast forward now 20 years to the riots of 1982, by which time the Meerut IRS was fully developed, and the political context had changed significantly. The riots of 1982 were ultimately overshadowed, and have since been almost forgotten, in the aftermath of the even more horrendous massacres of 1987 in Meerut and nearby localities of Maliana and Hashimpur. These massacres were so horrific and went so far beyond anything that had happened before, either in Meerut or in other parts of the country since partition, that they received quite considerable national and some international attention. Moreover, efforts continue to this day to bring to book through the Indian courts the principal culprits in those great massacres. 1987 was, in effect, the culmination of a quarter century of development of the Meerut IRS, but the way was paved by the great trial run of 1982. It

**Table 3: Election Results for Meerut City Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Segment, 1952 to 1962**

Year	Turnout (Valid Votes Only)		Candidates	Caste/Community	Party	Votes Polled	Percentage of Total Valid Votes
	No	Per Cent					
1952 <sup>a</sup>	43,988	53.39	Kailash Prakash	Bania	INC	26,542	60.33
			Ram Sarup Sharma	Brahman	IND	6,943	15.80
			Raja Ram		Jan Sangh	4,957	11.27
			Madan Mohan		Socialist	4,626	10.52
			Madho Prasad		IND	490	1.11
			Kashi Ram		IND	430	0.97
1957 <sup>b</sup>	52,915	67.56	Kailash Prakash	Bania	INC	27,059	51.14
			Aizaz Hussain	Muslim	CPI	18,604	35.16
			V S Vinod	Vaish	IND	3,130	5.92
			Pershadi Lal		JS	2,344	4.43
			Bishan Sarup		RRP	1,115	2.11
			Ghamandi Lal		IND	663	1.25
1962 <sup>c</sup>	56,849	62.31	Jagdish Saran Rastogi	Bania	INC	18,026	31.71
			Mohan Lal Kapoor	Khatri	JS	14,683	25.83
			A Majeed [Abdul Majid]	Muslim (Ansari)	PSP	12,072	21.24
			Hakim Ullah	Muslim (Lohar)	CPI	4,499	7.91
			V S Vinod	Vaish	HMS	3,168	5.57
			Shiva Nand	NA	IND	2,049	3.60
			Others (5)			2,352	4.14
			1962 Lok Sabha, Meerut segment	58,793	64.44	Shah Nawaz Khan	Muslim
Maharaj Singh Bharati	Jat	Socialist	21,340	36.30			
Shiv Datt Singh	Jatav	JS	4,361	7.42			
Ratish Mohan Agarwal	Bania	IND	642	1.09			

*Notes:* a January 3-25, 1952; b March 9, 1957; c February 23, 1962.

is important, therefore, for many reasons, not to forget 1982 if we are to understand how riots become endemic in a particular site and how their perpetrators are enabled to move from transgression to transgression with relative impunity. In contrast to the situation with regard to the 1961 riots just discussed, information on the 1982 riots from my own interviews and from the documentary record are ample.<sup>16</sup> This in itself constitutes an important difference, the significance of which will be discussed in the conclusions.

### Changed Political Context

The political context had changed dramatically during the previous two decades. Jawaharlal Nehru was prime minister in 1961; he had never deviated from devotion to secular principles and had broad support among the Muslims in the country. However, over the years during Indira Gandhi's turbulent rule, she and the Congress had lost much of their former support among Muslims, especially in north India. This change occurred partly because of a general rise of Muslim political assertiveness on many issues, including the increasing frequency and scale of rioting during the preceding 20 years, and Muslim disillusionment in consequence of these riots. At the same time, Indira Gandhi had changed her political tactics and had begun to appeal more and more directly to Hindus, in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in the country. The opposition to her had also changed. The former Jan Sangh had been transmuted into the BJP and was projecting a moderate face, which made possible interparty

alliances between it and other non-Congress parties. However, many in the RSS, the organisational base of the BJP, distrusted the new face of the BJP, preferred Gandhi's new face, and, in my personal knowledge, did support Congress candidates in UP in the ensuing elections of 1984 and 1985.

The political context in Meerut had also changed dramatically, twice over in fact, since the riots of 1961 and 1968.<sup>17</sup> Between 1967 and 1974, the Jan Sangh had captured the Meerut city legislative assembly constituency (Table 4). Its candidate, Mohan Lal Kapoor, had won the elections of 1967, 1969, and 1974. However, between 1974 and the Meerut riots of 1982, the political context had once again been transformed. The emergency had come and gone, the Jan Sangh had merged into the Janata Party, along with other parties, to defeat the Congress in the 1977 elections, and, after the disintegration of the Janata Party, the BJP had not been able to retain the Jan Sangh's hold on Meerut city, though its candidate remained Mohan Lal Kapoor. Instead, the Congress appealed directly to the Muslim voters in its efforts to regain both the Meerut city legislative assembly constituency and the Meerut Lok Sabha constituency by running Muslim candidates in both constituencies, who had been loyal to Indira Gandhi during the emergency. The Congress, with Manzur Ahmad as its candidate, succeeded in wresting the Meerut city constituency in the June, 1977 elections, and secured it again with the same candidate in 1980. It regained the Lok Sabha constituency in 1980, with Mohsina Kidwai as its candidate.

But now, in the highly competitive political and electoral context that had emerged in the aftermath of the emergency,

**Table 4: Election Results for Meerut City Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Segment, 1967 to 1984**

Year	Turnout (Valid Votes Only)		Candidates	Caste/Community	Party	Votes Polled	Percentage of Total Valid Votes
	No	Per Cent					
1967 Lok Sabha, Meerut City segment <sup>a</sup>	64,408	58.86	Maharaj Singh Bharati	Jat	SSP	31,292	48.58
			Shah Nawaz Khan	Muslim	INC	25,344	39.35
			Shiv Kumar Tyagi	Tyagi Brahman	BJS	6,107	9.48
			Munshi Man Phool Singh	NA	IND	1,665	2.59
1967 <sup>b</sup>	62,840	57.43	M L Kapoor	Khatri	BJS	26,905	42.82
			A Majid	Muslim	SSP	17,553	27.93
			J S Rastogi	NA	INC	15,829	25.19
			A K Muji	Muslim	IND	1,646	2.62
			Others (3)	1 Muslim		907	1.44
1969 <sup>c</sup>	75,233	66.97	Mohan Lal Kapoor	Khatri	BJS	25,735	34.21
			Basir Ahmad Khan	Muslim	BP <sup>d</sup>	23,259	30.92
			Shakuntala Pundrikaksh	NA	INC	17,346	23.06
			Nazir Ahmad	Muslim	BKD	5,036	6.69
			Budh Prakash		IND	1,782	2.37
			Others (8)			2,075	2.76
1974 <sup>e</sup>	77,389	67.34	Mohan Lal Kapoor	Khatri	BJS	31,508	40.71
			Husna Begum (W)	Muslim	INC	22,069	28.52
			Tasneem Ahmed	Muslim	MUL	18,119	23.41
			Abdul Majid	Muslim	IND	3,348	4.33
			Others (6)			2,345	s3.03
1977 <sup>f</sup>	78,498	60.20	Manzoor Ahmed	Muslim	INC	42,004	53.51
			Mohal Lal Kapoor	Khatri	JNP	34,903	44.46
			Deena Nath Gupta	Agarwal	HMS	773	0.98
			Others (3)		IND	818	1.16
1980 <sup>g</sup>	70,756	46.04	Manzoor Ahmad	Muslim	INC (I)	32,407	45.80
			Mohan Lal Kapoor	Khatri	BJP	29,023	41.02
			Abdul Majid	Muslim	JNP (SC)	6,648	9.40
			Others (12)			2,678	3.78
1984 Lok Sabha, Meerut City segment <sup>h</sup>	109,667	64.38	Manzoor Ahmad	Muslim	LKD	43,061	39.27
			Mohsina Kidwai	Muslim	INC	39,542	36.06
			Braham Pal Singh		BJP	21,755	19.84
			Ambika Soni (W)		JNP	2,355	2.15
			Others (29)			2,954	2.69

Notes: a Date of Poll: February 15 or 17; b February 15; c February 9; d Backward Party; e February 24 or 26; f June 10, 12, or 14; g May 28 or 31; h December 24 or 27.

Indira Gandhi had once again changed her tactics, as above noted, towards more conscious efforts to retain and expand the hold of the Congress among the Hindu majority population of the country.

### **Origin of the 1982 Riots**

There is a virtually universal tendency to seek a precipitant or cause for the beginning of every large-scale riot, to give it a central focus, a date, and an explanation. I have also noted elsewhere that this type of effort is misleading, distracts our attention from the activities, incidents, and preparations that are involved by riot producers, who fasten upon local controversies when the time is ripe to let loose the violence. Further, there are always multiple narratives concerning the unfolding of events, including the singular event upon which the effort of explanation is focused.<sup>18</sup> That was the case in the 1982 Meerut riots, where the central focus was upon a site in the mohalla of Shaghasa variously described to me, and visited by me, in August, 1983. That site was described alternatively as a temple or a 'mazâr', or a drinking water well that was either in use or not in use, and even as a site adjacent to a latrine. The ownership of the site was also disputed. And the so-called real reasons for the dispute and its transformation into a great riot are also contested.

In my experience, this type of controversy, or description of a controversy, between Hindus and Muslims, is virtually universal in the cities and towns in north India where Hindu and Muslim populations live in mixed neighbourhoods. These local disputes, some of them completely fabricated, as I believe was the case in Meerut in 1982, are mini-Ayodhyas, the source of the provocative and disingenuous militant Hindu claim that there are some 3,000 sites where Hindu temples were destroyed in the distant past to make way for Muslim mosques. These controversies can rise to the level of widespread rioting only if external political forces are brought to the scene to make use of them for their own purposes. In Meerut, as elsewhere in India at this time, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was active, in the early stages of the Ayodhya movement itself, and it and other elements in the Sangh parivar also became involved in this affair.

But it is my contention that this local dispute had even then a much broader political significance in Indian politics and society that continues up to the present day. The Meerut site is merely one location in a huge grid or lattice-work of such sites that are laced together especially, but not exclusively, in northern and western India. The grid is much denser in these parts, but it extends to many other parts of the country, including the deep south, where new sites of this type are currently being activated.<sup>19</sup> Further, the Meerut situation had multi-level political-electoral ramifications: it was used to mobilise Hindus and Muslims on opposite sides in municipal elections that were held in the midst of the controversy; the local politicians also had their sights set on its consequences for them in future legislative assembly elections; and it was a replica of the developing conflict in Ayodhya.

Another way of seeing the creation of these little sites of conflict, with only slightly different variations to fit each local context, is to consider them as an element or, as Tilly has put it, a 'routine' in a political repertoire of staged conflicts.<sup>20</sup> Far from springing directly out of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations, religious differences, and social animosities, or even out of long-simmering local disputes, these temple-mosque and mandir-mazâr conflicts are recently learned forms of collective

action,<sup>21</sup> with specific aims of producing the very animosities, controversies, and violence (when desired) from which they are alleged to have sprung. Moreover, their purpose is also clear: to produce electoral benefits and, in the Indian political scene of the past two decades, to produce a complete shift in the forms of political domination in the country. The routines are well known, widely spread, and are probably not centrally directed. But they are often – if not generally – deliberately staged. They are staged in the same way as Gandhi's mass movements, which selected particular foci that would arouse the people of India against the British and British rule, but in a disciplined, peaceful, non-violent manner. In Indian politics of the past two decades, however, the organisations in the militant Hindu family have deliberately chosen to focus on issues that will divide Hindus and Muslims, knowingly inciting crowds to turbulence and violent action. Muslim politicians, religious leaders, and other Muslim organisations have also contributed to the process, but the main driving forces behind the spatial extension of these local conflicts, and the main beneficiaries, have been the militant Hindu family of organisations.

### **On the Question of Civic Action and Civic Engagement**

The district administration was roundly criticised from many sources for its procrastinating incompetence in dealing with the build-up to the 1982 riots in the months between March 1982 when the dispute in Shaghasa began to acquire attention outside the locality, the outbreak of severe rioting and killing between September 6 and 11, and the denouement in the massacre of 29 or 31 people in the Feroze Building and the surrounding area between September 29 and October 1. An additional casualty caused by its procrastinating incompetence was the sundering of intercommunal relationships within the leading commercial and professional organisations of the city. In this process, a petty local conflict in a mohalla, involving mostly the unsavory actions of a few interested parties, was taken over by the militant Hindu forces in search of a communal issue to manipulate in anticipation of municipal elections, into a citywide issue that ultimately involved directly – through violence or anticipation of violence by imposition of curfew – 60 mohallas in the city. At the end of this process, just before the massacre at the Feroze Building, the two leading commercial and professional organisations of the city, the traders' association and the bar association, instead of playing a constructive role or, at the least, remaining out of the fray, acted to exacerbate it and, thereby, bore a share in the responsibility for the appalling finale.

Previous to the riots in 1982, there had been no riots in the city for a decade. The dispute at the site in Shaghasa was an entirely local affair. The decisive turning point in its transformation into a citywide matter came with the killing of a pujari on September 6.<sup>22</sup> As it did throughout the developing situation, the local administration failed in its duty to quickly locate the murderer(s) or some suspects and to take every measure to assure the populace that it was a crime that would be immediately, thoroughly investigated, that the Muslim community as a whole did not condone it, that the criminals would be brought to book, and that no public agitations would be allowed to transform the crime into an intercommunal affair. In fact, quite the opposite happened.

But what about the commercial and professional associations

themselves, whose actions, as I will now show, preceded the final act in the drama? Before and after the critical date of September 6, when the 'pujari' was murdered, the city administration and the city courts had acted at cross purposes with each other. On September 14, the city magistrate ordered the disputed site, which he declared was neither a temple nor a tomb, locked up. Following upon the order of the city magistrate, the district magistrate, now faced with a dangerously escalating communal confrontation, including ongoing violent acts, attached the building and closed it under Section 146 of the Criminal Procedure Code, thereby denying access to the site for any and all purposes, including access by a tenant, one Jaswant Devi, to her room.

It is at this explosive moment that the communal confrontation engulfed the entire city. The Traders' Association, dominated overwhelmingly by Hindus, on September 18, declared a 'hartal' (strike and closure of all shops throughout the city) in protest against the decision of the district magistrate, which lasted for two to three days according to one account, but for six days according to the press, ending only on September 23.<sup>23</sup> In response to the strike of the traders, a requisitioned meeting of the Bar Association, also dominated by Hindus, was called for the day after the traders' strike was announced, on September 19. As my respondent in the Bar Association put it, the "Bar Association is dominated by the majority community, the Hindus, and naturally the passions were very high at the time."<sup>24</sup> Of course, the respondent is here referring to Hindu passions that had affected the Hindu attorneys. The Muslim attorneys whom I interviewed were incensed by the call for the meeting and did not attend it.<sup>25</sup> The meeting, however, was "a very well-attended meeting and ... there was a resolution that we should also observe a strike in sympathy with the traders or in opposition to the order of the district magistrate attaching the Hindu temple." The intent of the motion was to remain on strike until the attachment order was withdrawn. However, a compromise resolution was passed that the lawyers would go on a sympathy strike with the traders, who had previously gone on a sympathy strike with the lawyers on an entirely unrelated matter. The final resolution, therefore, was that the lawyers would strike for only a day-and-a-half in sympathy with the traders and in opposition to the attachment order, which they considered 'patently illegal'. Thereafter, none other than the president of the Bar Association 'moved an appeal before the district judge against the order, challenging the legality of the order', which he claimed was signed as well by some Muslim lawyers 'because that appeal was not a communal appeal', only a challenge to an illegal attachment order. The appeal against the order made to the district and sessions judge was successful, the attachment order was declared null and void, and the seal removed on the evening of September 22. The next day, the traders' strike ended, and it was reported that "'victory' was celebrated. The BJP leaders (sought) to take the entire credit to themselves, marched in victory to the disputed place and the lock was opened. Mohan Lal Kapoor and other BJP leaders led the victory procession."<sup>26</sup>

All protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, it is hardly to be doubted that the actions of the Hindu traders and lawyers, as well as doctors who also joined in the strike at this time, were unnecessary, provocative, and communal, entirely on the side of the Hindu protagonists in the dispute. Most important, it demonstrates the power of communal political mobilisations to override all intercommunal relations, associations, and common actions to maintain or restore peace when the police and civil

authorities fail in their duties to maintain law and order. It is politics and police, not civic engagement or its absence that determine the course of communal violence.

The district administration responded to the increasing polarisation of feeling and countermobilisations in the city by calling a meeting of the leading Hindu and Muslim politicians, lawyers, and journalists to discuss means of calming the situation. In the meantime, peace committees were said to have been activated in the mohallas, 'a peace procession' was also said to have marched 'through the main streets of the city', and 'felicitations' were said to have been offered to Muslims upon the celebration of the festival of Id, which took place at this time.<sup>27</sup> The offering of such good wishes to Muslims during Id was once common in most cities and towns in UP where good relations existed among members of the two communities. Militant Hindus and the home minister of the government of India were maintaining that the tradition was maintained on this Id, but their statements were flatly contradicted in a speech in the Rajya Sabha by a man from Meerut, Satya Pal Malik, who insisted that this was not the case and that the situation that had developed in Meerut by the date of Id on this year, that is, September 28 had left, as he put it, no human being in Meerut, only Hindus and Muslims, in short a total communal polarisation in the city.<sup>28</sup> He also decried the failure of the administration to utilise the good offices of older Congress Gandhians in the city by felicitating their movement so that they might attempt to bring about peace. However, all such efforts either failed to have any significant impact or did not take place at all, and incidents of violence continued in various mohallas in the city. All authorities having failed in their duties, Hindu communal elements having won a major victory, the city now completely polarised, the streets still unsafe – though there appeared to be a lull in the violence – it was left only for the police to punish the Muslims of Meerut.<sup>29</sup>

### **Massacre at the Feroze Building**

The most infamous and atrocious incident during the 1982 riots was the massacre of an estimated 29 people – men, women, and children, all Muslims – by the PAC at a site known as the Feroze Building. This incident, to my mind, was a rehearsal for the great Maliana and Hashimpur massacres of 1987. Before proceeding further in this discussion, to avoid misunderstanding, let me clarify once again that, in using the metaphor of a drama, I do not mean that the Maliana and Hashimpur massacres were already planned in 1982. What I mean by a rehearsal is – to use the Tilly-Tarrow phrasing – the addition of a new element to the repertoire of violent acts committed under the cover of so-called communal riots. Like the favourable reception accorded to a play, if such an act of transgression is allowed to stand, it will be repeated, and there will be further, larger enactments in future. That is exactly what I believe happened in 1982 and 1987. The actions of the perpetrators of the 1982 massacres were condemned by many, justified by many others, but ultimately accepted within society and the political order as a whole. In effect, the response was sufficiently positive to permit repeat performances. How can that be?

The answer to the latter question requires careful examination of the responses to it by those who cared enough about it to articulate their views. Several respondents on both sides of the matter described the Meerut riot of 1982 as not a riot, but a police-Muslim confrontation. Many respondents, associated with



secular political parties and other organisations, were sympathetic to the Muslims and considered the PAC at fault, guilty of brutal acts, including especially the massacre at the Feroze Building where, as one respondent put it, many persons were killed, children and women included.<sup>30</sup> Militant Hindus also accepted that this was a police-Muslim confrontation, but blamed the Muslims for attacking the police and justified the police response as appropriate and necessary. However, my interviews and the documentary evidence available, including published accounts by impartial observers, make it clear that the police indubitably took the Hindu side in these riots. Although they did face a dangerous situation throughout large parts of the city in which extensive rioting was taking place, they behaved as they normally do, sympathising with the Hindus as they do. All the PAC jawans on duty were non-Muslim. And, I believe, here as in so many other riots in India since then, they took out their rage, embedded in Hindu minds since partition, and intensified during Hindu-Muslim riotous confrontations, upon the Muslims in general.

In a word, the police, however far one tries to understand their feelings, emotions, and tensions, acted with impunity and deliberateness in slaughtering Muslims of both sexes between the ages of two and 80 in the Feroze Building, without sustaining a single injury to themselves in this particular situation. It was finally these massacres that brought an end to the Meerut riots of 1982, for their scale could not be hidden as the English-language press dutifully reported each day's official death toll. At last, the government of India was faced with outraged members of parliament in both houses, first through a calling attention motion in the upper house (Rajya Sabha),<sup>31</sup> then in a special motion in the lower house (Lok Sabha),<sup>32</sup> during which the home minister was required to give his account and assessment of the situation. Within a few days of the massacres, central forces were sent to Meerut from the Central Reserve Police and the Border Security Force, who have had a long history of acting impartially during Hindu-Muslim riots, and the process of transferring the incompetent local police and civilian administrative officers was belatedly begun by the state government.

## Conclusion

I want to conclude by summarising the similarities and differences between the riots of 1961 and 1982. First, the similarities. There is a clear connection in both cases between the timing of the riots and elections, legislative assembly elections in 1961-62 and municipal elections in 1982, and the involvement of local politicians in the events that led up to the riots. Intercommunal associations existed in Meerut at the time of both riots, but were overpowered by the momentum of events and the passions aroused by them at the time, leading to polarisation on both sides and consolidation of communal voting in subsequent elections. On both occasions, the police were partial to the Hindu side and acted in a hostile manner towards Muslims. The riots on both occasions, though they originated in local disputes, had multi-level political significance and involved politicians and other activists from the local level to the state to the national level.

Finally, with regard to the question of civic action to prevent, contain, and control riots, it is evident that the political mobilisation of communal sentiment overpowered whatever civic engagement existed in Meerut and that civic action to contain and control rioting once started was ineffective. The ability to sustain intercommunal relations, sentiments, and actions, and thus

provide a barrier to communal violence, decreases the longer the authorities delay, procrastinate, and thereby allow the momentum of the move towards a communal riot to accelerate. At some point, if no action, or insufficient or incompetent measures are taken, the end result is total communal polarisation that overwhelms all existing intercommunal feelings of commercial, professional, and interpersonal solidarity.

The differences between the origins, development, and denouement of the two riots are profound. First, the 1961 riots arose out of student fracas into which others, especially local politicians, were drawn, and from which they sought political advantage. The 1982 riots, in contrast, were a staged performance in a new repertoire that was being enacted in other parts of the country and that continues to be enacted up to the very present. Second, there is the shadowy presence, if not the direct, active involvement, of a national militant Hindu organisation, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the issues raised by it during that time up to the present, that enables the incorporation of local issues into a national frame. Third, stable governments and a unified stance towards containment of the riots, however ineffective, existed in 1961, but were absent in 1982. Indeed, there were deep political divisions at all levels in 1982, local, state, and national that prevented uniform, prompt, and decisive action.

The district administration of the time was incompetent, and some of its officers were partial to the Hindu side. The Congress was in power in the state government, whose chief minister Sripat Misra was one of the weakest in the state's history, whose government was unstable and divided by factional divisions concerning the distribution of portfolios. Moreover, in those days, no Congress chief minister could do anything of political importance without consulting the prime minister or her son, Rajiv Gandhi, or other close associates of the ruling family in New Delhi. While the rioting was spreading in Meerut, the chief minister held on to the home portfolio, that is, the ministerial position whose occupant is responsible for law and order in the state, including control of the police forces. In the political conditions of the time, Sripat Misra, otherwise occupied, subject to control from Delhi, had neither the will nor the capacity to issue the necessary orders to bring the Meerut rioting to an end. Such orders should have begun with the transfer of the senior administrative and police officers of the district as soon as it was evident that they had failed in their duties, a practice that has since become the norm.

As for New Delhi itself, it has already been noted above that the prime minister was herself seeking to transform the Congress support base in the country, especially in the north, by courting militant Hindu support, including that of the RSS. So, the central government itself procrastinated. It need not have waited for the state government to request the deployment of central forces since the state government would bow to the merest wish of the prime minister in those days. In short, at no level of government whatsoever in India at that time was there any disposition to exercise effective force to bring the Meerut rioting to an end until the massacre at the Feroze Building drew sufficient media and public attention to the consequences of this total failure of government responsibility in India.

Fourth, we witness in 1982 not merely police partiality, not merely a riot, but a vicious police (PAC) attack upon the Muslim population at the termination of the riots in a pattern that, again, has not only continued up to present times, but became even more extreme at this site (in 1987) and at other sites (Gujarat, 2002).

All these differences add up to the demonstrable presence of a system and a set of practices that constitute what I have characterised as an institutionalised riot system, a system that can be activated when the time is ripe and that involves the utilisation of a coherent repertoire of routine actions.

The differences clearly outweigh the similarities in their implications for intercommunal relations in contemporary India, which can only be seen in negative terms. There is, however, a difference, with more hopeful implications, between the two situations, namely, the extent of documentation that exists for 1982 and later riots compared to what existed in 1961. There exists now in India an institutionalised system of riot documentation (call it an ISRD) that comes into play after each riot, that embraces a range of civil liberties organisations, secular intellectuals, retired Supreme Court judges, English-language press journalists, and others, who go to the sites of these riots, pogroms, and massacres, record for all time the actions of IRS actors, including often the names of the leading perpetrators, and create a body of truths to counter the mendacities of the perpetrators and the blame-displacing claims of their apologists. Up till the present, the force of the institutionalised riot systems that continue to exist at numerous sites in India continues to outweigh the ISRD, but the latter provides a ground for hope that this form of extra-local civic action may acquire sufficient political force and backing to ultimately displace and contain the former. [37]

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## Notes

- 1 Although the data are unreliable, Meerut also ranks very high in the list of 'riot-prone towns' in India in the period from 1960 to 1993, in Ashutosh Varshney and Steven I. Wilkinson, *Hindu-Muslim Riots 1960-93: New Findings, Possible Remedies*, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, 1996, p 27, and also in the period from 1950 to 1995 in Ashutosh Varshney, 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond', *World Politics*, 53, No 3, April 2001, p 372. In the latter article, Meerut and Aligarh rank fourth and fifth, respectively in the number of deaths in the period, just below the three metropolitan cities of Bombay, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad.
- 2 Paul R Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2003 and Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2004.
- 3 Steven I Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp 52-53.
- 4 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002. I have outlined some of the numerous deficiencies in this work in Brass, pp 418-19 fn.
- 5 Wilkinson, p 44.
- 6 See Wilkinson, pp 53-57 on the absence of statistical data, and, on the paucity of either quantitative or qualitative data, see Dipankar Gupta's review of Varshney's book, under the title, 'Fanaticising Religion' in *The Book Review*, September 2002.
- 7 My research in Meerut city and district actually began in 1962, but my focus was different at that time and did not touch upon the 1961 riots.
- 8 *The Times of India (TOI)*, October 9, 1961.
- 9 *TOI*, October 8, 1961.
- 10 *TOI*, October 7, 1961.
- 11 I have no further information on this organisation, which seems to refer to a local musical and poetry society.
- 12 *TOI*, October 8, 1961.
- 13 *TOI*, October 10, 1961.
- 14 *TOI*, October 11, 1961.
- 15 Among those reported to have been arrested for curfew violation on October 7 was the RSS organiser, Rameshwar Dayal; *TOI*, October 8, 1961.
- 16 There are also two other published reports, based on original research in Meerut undertaken shortly after these riots, by Asghar Ali Engineer,

- 'An Analytical Study of the Meerut Riot' in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*, Sangam Books, Hyderabad, 1984, pp 271-80 and N C Saxena, 'Inquiry Report on Meerut Riots, September-October, 1982', (abridged version) in Iqbal A Ansari (ed), *Communal Riots: The State and Law in India*, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, pp 356-66. See also a later report by Anamika Srivastava, *Communal Violence and Administration*, Rawat, New Delhi, 1999, ch. 8.
- 17 The 1968 riots and their political consequences cannot be discussed here, but will be taken up by me in later publications.
- 18 I have demonstrated this especially in Paul R Brass, *Theft of an Idol*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997.
- 19 For example, the recent controversy fomented by the RSS in Chikmagalur in Karnataka concerning the Bababudangiri Sufi shrine, *Frontline*, Vol 20, No 26, December 20, 2003-January 2, 2004.
- 20 Tilly refers, for example, in his discussion of the development of mass politics in Great Britain, to 'repertoires of contention'. The word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice... People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organise special-interest associations. At any particular point in history, however, they learn only a rather small number of alternative ways to act collectively"; Charles Tilly, 'Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834', *Social Science History* 17:2 (Summer 1993), p 264.
- 21 Or relearned, if one accepts the view of C A Bayly, 'The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860' in the author's *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp 225 ff.
- 22 The status and character of the pujari were also disputed.
- 23 *The Indian Express*, September 25, 1982.
- 24 Interview in Meerut, August 21, 1983.
- 25 It is relevant to note as well that, during the movement in East Pakistan in 1971 that led ultimately to the war with India and Pakistan and the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh, the Meerut Bar Association passed a resolution that every member of the association should contribute five rupees to the help the Bangladesh movement; interview in Meerut, August 29, 1983. Such a resolution would have applied to the Muslim members as well, who would then have had to decide whether they wished to contribute or not. It is virtually certain that all Hindus at that time were sympathetic to the Bangladesh movement, but not equally certain that all Muslims were. In fact, at such times of conflict between India and Pakistan, the usual response of most Indian Muslims is silence, though there are some prominent Muslims in India who are quite vocal in their anti-Pakistan attitudes. In the Meerut case, a Muslim attorney who opposed the Bar Association resolution on the grounds that the members of the Bar Association should not be taking political stands was debarred from membership of the Bar Association thereafter.
- 26 Braj Raj Kishore, *Anatomy of Meerut Riots*, CPI Publication, New Delhi, 1983, p 11.
- 27 Statement, before the chairman, Meerut Enquiry Commission at Meerut, presented by the Nagrik Samanya Samiti, 1983 (cyclostyled), pp 28-29; also the statement of the home minister of the government of India in the Rajya Sabha, October 5, 1982, col 203.
- 28 'Aj merath shahar men agar ap jayenge to ap ko sach bolne wala ko nahin milega. Ap ko wahan insan nahin milega. Ap ko wahan Hindu milega ya ap ko wahan Musalman milega, lekin ap ko wahan insan nahin milega' (Today if you should go into Meerut city, then you will not find anyone telling the truth. You will not find a human being there. You will find there a Hindu or your will find there a Muslim, but you will not find a human being there). Statement of Satya Pal Malik in Rajya Sabha, October 5, 1982, cols 219-23.
- 29 Naresh Saxena described the attitude of the district administration 'right from the very beginning' as anti-Muslim and commented further on police action in Meerut at the time as follows. "The orders from the senior officers in the district to the police could be summarised (sic) in one phrase. 'Muslims must be taught a lesson';" p 365. The final lesson for the Muslims was the massacre at the Feroze Building.
- 30 'Bacchon mare gaye, auraton mari gayi'; interview in Meerut, August 15, 1983.
- 31 India, *Parliamentary Debates: Rajya Sabha Official Report*, Vol CXXIV, No 2, October 5, 1982, cols 202-303.
- 32 India, *Lok Sabha Debates*, Seventh Series, Vol XXXII, No 4, October 7, 1982, cols 327-490.