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Review Symposium: The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India by Paul R. Brass (published May 2005, pbk)

Politics by other means

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Paul Brass' latest book *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (2003) is an extraordinary work that sums up almost 40 years of research on politics, religious identities and violence in northern India. Focusing on the politics of Hindu–Muslim relations in one city in Uttar Pradesh – Aligarh – over the entire post-Independence era, Brass argues that riots are permanent features of Indian politics, produced and staged by 'institutionalized riot systems'. Condemning and bemoaning riots and casualties have become part of India's modern political culture – as much as the riots themselves.

Brass's introductory chapter takes aim at what he sees as the unsatisfactory and, ultimately, mystifying explanations that have been advanced in explaining riots. 'Naturalizing' accounts portray riots as inevitable eruptions of anger between communities divided by deep and incommensurable differences. Others view riots as pathologies of Indian political life, resulting from the cynical manipulation of religious passions by criminal business people and ill-intentioned politicians focused on short-term electoral gains. These explanations, Brass argues, not only obscure the processes at work; they are complicit in the very regime of interpretation that perpetuates riots. Portraying them as either 'justified' or as short lived 'aberrations', these explanations fail to recognize the integral, normalized roles riots play in political competition and communal organization in large parts of India.

With its prosperous Hindu *bania* (trader) communities and substantial Muslim artisan population, Aligarh is a typical north Indian city. At the same time, the presence of India's premier Muslim institution, Aligarh Muslim University, the deep and enduring communal polarization in the city, and the early alliances between Muslims and ex-untouchables make the city special. Unlike Ashutosh Varshney in his recent work (Varshney, 2002), Brass rejects the official classification of certain cities as 'riot-prone'. *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* emerges as a welcome rejoinder to Varshney's influential and overly schematic analysis, where communal riots result from the absence of civic ties across communities. In explaining specific riots, Brass obviously finds analytical distinctions between 'politics', 'civil society', and 'the state' less plausible than the detailed stories of individual careers and sociopolitical networks in the city's neighbourhoods.

Riots are best understood as the results of actions by identifiable specialists and networks of specialists in 'riot-production': the systematic rehearsal, staging and interpretation of collective violence as spontaneous acts of self-defence or retaliation against what is perceived as unjust and murderous threats from the other community. Understood in this way, Brass sensibly concludes, riots can be policed and prevented more effectively. How does Brass reach his conclusion? How does his conception of riots as complex localized productions compare to other explanations of riots in South Asia?

The evidence presented in the book is comprehensive and represents, thus far, the most systematic exploration of 'riot production' in India (and possibly anywhere).

Brass presents the context and development of a sequence of riots in Aligarh since 1925 and explores the changing roles of Aligarh Muslim University, national political campaigns, local rivalries over space and livelihoods, and policing strategies. He presents data on the changing spatial and demographic features of Aligarh, testing the popular thesis of Hindu–Muslim economic competition as the source of rioting. In subsequent sections Brass analyzes the nature of political competition and local electoral arithmetic with cogency and precision, while the role of the police and the media are treated in separate chapters.

The sheer volume and complexity of this unique longitudinal study comprising interviews, official reports, statistical evidence, and biographies of key figures prevents strong conclusions. Brass reminds us that riots do not happen in most places most of the time, not even in times of generalized *tanav* (tension) between communities. His material convincingly demonstrates that over the decades, riots have repeatedly occurred in only four or five specific localities in Aligarh. These localities are all characterized by the presence of seasoned riot specialists, men whose activities span business, politics, and cultural-religious organizations; men who are

willing and able to translate rumours and general discourses into local mobilization.

RIOTS AS ROUTINE POLITICS

This book is the work of a mature mind and does not discount the broader cultural and psychological explanations of how the history of Hindu–Muslim enmity has, over time, produced a rich archive of mythical knowledge of ‘the other’, an archive which defies logic and reasoned argument. Brass is, however, more interested in when, where and how this archive is activated and transformed into arguments for action and violence. His insistence on ‘demystification’ is refreshing and this book once again shows the immense value of sustained and localized field research.

The most suggestive conclusion to emerge from Brass’s book is that riots are integral and routinized aspects of India’s modern political culture, and that condemning and bemoaning riots and their casualties have become as much a part of this political culture as the riots themselves. Recent studies of lower caste movements and other forms of political mobilization in India suggest that activists are groomed to regard politics as a permanent state of warfare. Violence no longer represents the breakdown of political communication, but lies, rather, at the heart of contemporary Indian political practice.

For all its merits, the book leaves a range of questions unanswered. We hear a great deal about the ‘riot systems’ constructed over decades by various Hindu nationalist figures in Aligarh. The riot systems on the other side, among Muslims, appear less documented – almost non-existent – despite stories of links between Muslim criminals and academics at Aligarh Muslim University. Is this due to the difficulties involved in gathering information from marginalized communities? Or is it because their networks are differently organized? Or absent? Or is the whole idea of symmetry, of equally apportioning blame and culpability to Hindus and Muslims – really a myth in itself and a part of an official interpretative regime that absolves Hindu nationalists of their prime responsibility for what are, increasingly, anti-Muslim pogroms?

Another question left open is why riots occur in localities without established ‘riot systems’. Brass’s answer would undoubtedly be that ‘new’ riots signify initial and necessary steps by local operators in organizing more permanent ‘systems’ that will ensure both their influence over a constituency and the political effectiveness of future riots. Yet, the question is whether this comes close to a tautology. Can one, for instance, assume that a riot always represents more of the same logic? The evidence on the effects of the Babri Masjid controversy in Aligarh

indicates that the national scale and systematicity of Hindu nationalist campaigns in recent years constantly transform new areas into loci of communal conflict and violence and thus seem to reduce the significance of local factors.

THE ARITHMETIC OF HATRED

Although Brass has qualified his earlier, more hard-headed 'instrumentalist' position on how and why ethnic-communal identities are created and maintained, assumptions of underlying political rationalities reverberate through the book. Riots are ultimately rational mechanisms organized and orchestrated in order to consolidate political constituencies and to reproduce paranoia and mistrust. The problem with this 'switch on/off' theory of riot production is that it assumes that political operators working behind the scenes always have their eyes on the larger, supra-local picture. Brass's own evidence, however, provides several examples of how this was not always the case. His interviews with key figures also make it plain that they are deeply immersed in what he brands irrational and 'fantastical' ideas about the threat posed to the Hindu majority in India. Maybe we should see riots as truly political actions, i.e. tentative, chaotic, and complex occurrences, immersed in dominant social and political ideological formations and always unpredictable in their effects. We cannot extrapolate causes from effects. We can, Brass reminds us, always be sure that riots are intentional and organized with certain objectives in mind. Yet, the 'riot systems' do not always manage to produce the desired effects.

The postscript on the pogroms in Gujarat in 2002 provides additional support for Brass's thesis of riot systems being systemic features of India's political culture. Aligarh has experienced almost a decade without violence: during this time political alignments have shifted and the Muslim population has grown in strength, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh remains paralysed. As a consequence, a non-communal candidate was elected by both Muslim and Hindu voters in 2002. Simultaneously, in the neighbouring state of Gujarat, the 'riots systems' painstakingly constructed by the Hindu nationalist movement organized a gruesome pogrom against Muslims, in complicity with the police and parts of the government. While the riot systems were dormant in Aligarh, they flourished in Gujarat because the BJP and aligned forces seized the opportunity to use public violence to consolidate 'Hindu sentiments' and their political constituency.

If Brass is right, the same can happen again in Aligarh when the combination of national political discourse, electoral arithmetic and local grievances make it possible and expedient for the seasoned riot specialists of that city to resume their deadly game.

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Review of Paul Brass

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It can hardly be disputed that communalism, particularly in its most horrifying manifestation in Hindu–Muslim riots, poses the gravest threat to the cohesiveness and stability of society and state in India. The social, economic and human costs of communal violence are enormous and in fact incalculable. There is an unfortunate dearth of systematic, intensive and empirically based studies on communal violence; most of the studies on the subject tend to be rather descriptive and lack analytical rigour and theoretical refinement. This book (Brass, 2003), based on an intensive case study of communal violence in the riot-prone town of Aligarh in northern India carried over a period of nearly 38 years, makes a valuable contribution to the systematic study of communal violence in contemporary India.

Brass argues that persistent communal violence in Aligarh, as elsewhere in the country, is embedded in a discourse of communalism which is premised on a deliberate and calculated accentuation of religious and cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims, hostility towards Muslims, and militant Hindu nationalism. Riots, according to him, are not spontaneous occurrences which can be facily explained in terms of mob fury. They are essentially a planned, orchestrated and institutionalized phenomenon. Brass argues that there exists at sites of endemic communal violence an ‘institutionalized riot system’ which works as a central factor in the genesis and persistence of communal riots. This system, which is

nourished and sustained by the discourse of communalism, involves a multiplicity of roles and a network of relations between specific individuals, economic interests, organizations, criminals, politicians, and the police. Brass maintains that there is a close linkage between communal violence and the political process, especially electoral competition and political mobilization.

In seeking to explain the persistence of communal violence Brass draws on a functionalist theory and argues that communal riots have functional utility and benefits for a wide range of groups and organizations in society, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other political organizations affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He points out that the Hindu–Muslim divide and polarization, which is rooted in the discourse of communalism and militant Hindu nationalism, has been extremely valuable to the political fortunes of the BJP.

In keeping with the view that riots are a product of planning and strategy, Brass speaks of three stages of riot production: preparation, actual enactment, and post-hoc explanation or interpretation. He provides, within the conceptual framework sketched out in the foregoing, a detailed explication and analysis of the pattern and dynamics of communal violence in Aligarh since Independence. The focus of the study, he emphasizes, is on how riots are produced, rather than on why they happen. The book contains some highly perceptive observations and penetrating insights into the dynamics of communal violence. It is written in a lucid, straightforward and candid style.

While Brass's systematically collected and enormous data on Aligarh and his analysis of the varied dimensions of communal violence are immensely valuable, his conceptual and methodological approach leave something to be desired. Though he is critical of causal analysis and emphasizes the central role of human agency in social processes, one can nevertheless notice a lurking positivistic propensity in his generalizations. Thus, he frequently talks about causal linkages, such as the 'direct causal link between riots and electoral/political competition' (p. 33). This nomothetic predilection is also betrayed in his hope that the findings of the book can be generalized to 'other parts of India *and to other times and places in the world*' (Preface, emphasis added). Apparently, Brass assumes or implies that all forms of violence in the world are fundamentally alike, and that they have basically the same dynamics, which can be explained in terms of a few parameters (or laws) having universal applicability. This positivistic assumption is a matter of belief rather than an empirically verifiable proposition. It disregards the enormous variations in the patterns and manifestations of violence in different social, cultural and political contexts and in their aetiology and motivations.

Drawing on the functionalist perspective, Brass argues that large-scale riots serve the interests of particular individuals, groups, organizations and

'even society as a whole in concrete, useful ways that are beneficial to them' (pp. 23–4, emphasis added). One can readily understand and agree that communal riots have functional utility for a wide range of groups and organizations that stand to benefit from them. However, one is at a loss to understand how riots could have functional utility or benefits for society as a whole. Evidently, riots bring about devastation, disruption and disharmony in the larger society. In other words, they are *dysfunctional* to society. Robert Merton, whose functionalist paradigm undergirds Brass's conceptualization, has clearly stated that certain forms of culture or social processes may have functional as well as dysfunctional consequences. Undoubtedly, the functionalist perspective has some heuristic value but, as the eminent British anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard cautioned many years ago, in its extreme form functionalism often leads to absolute relativism, a crude teleology, and a naïve determinism.

In tune with the functionalist perspective, Brass focuses on persistence and continuity and ignores the role of changing social and political contexts. The 'institutionalized riot system' may undergo radical changes over some period of time or may become ineffective or may even break up and disintegrate under the pressure of an efficient, impartial and forceful local administration, a vigilant local leadership, and concerted civic action. Brass refers to a key player in communal riots, described as a 'conversion specialist', who has a knack of turning a mere local, trivial incident into a potent tool for instigating a riot. But he fails to consider the possibility that the machinations of the 'conversion specialist' may well be thwarted by a watchful and responsible local administration with the cooperation of a vigilant local leadership. This has in fact happened in some places – in Bhiwandi (Maharashtra) in 1992 and in Surat (Gujarat) in 2002. Unfortunately, Brass does not take sufficient cognizance of the potentially effective role of the local administration and civic action in averting or preventing a riot, though he makes passing references to it (pp. 142, 169–70).

Brass's study raises, inadvertently, some methodological problems. The case study method employed in the study undoubtedly has the advantage of providing an in-depth, micro-view of the complexity and dynamics of specific social situations. However, it is not free from drawbacks. One tends to take one's field or area of study as a kind of yardstick of comparison and, on the basis of it, makes rather sweeping generalizations and extrapolations. Thus, Brass maintains that he is seeking an explanation for the persistence of communal violence in Aligarh which 'in turn can be generalized as an explanation for recurring riots elsewhere as well' (p. 38). Similarly, he asserts that the political context of communal violence is decisive, that it is riots that produce communal solidarity, not electoral politics that produces riots (pp. 367–71). Looking at the Gujarat carnage of 2002, one is inclined to believe that electoral politics, among other factors, may well lead to a riot.

It may be pointed out that generalizations based on a single case study

ignore the enormous diversity and complexity of Indian society in general and of riot-prone sites and riot situations in particular. Furthermore, such generalizations are usually made within a static framework and therefore do not take due cognizance of changing social and political contexts. In many respects, Aligarh has a rather unique character as a town and as a site of endemic communal violence, different from other riot-prone towns and cities. If one focuses on Aligarh, where the Hindu–Muslim divide and communal riots have been conspicuous, one would invariably be led to ask the question that Brass addresses: how riots persist and recur with such frequency and intensity. However, if one were to focus on a different riot-prone town or city – such as Surat or Bhiwandi, which have experienced violent Hindu–Muslim clashes as well as long periods of peaceful coexistence – one may be led to ask an altogether different, and far more important, question: how can riots be effectively averted or prevented?

Brass emphasizes, exaggeratedly, that riots are wholly a product of rational planning and preparation. To buttress his argument, he draws on the dramaturgical perspective and maintains that riots are ‘dramatic productions’ (p. 369). He elaborates:

The people of Aligarh, like devotees of theatre, are kept in a state of readiness for the next production (riot) through advertising of all kinds of trivial incidents that hold the promise of a great drama to follow . . . each production involves audience participation. (p. 358)

The contrasts between a riot and drama are too stark and glaring. While watching theatre brings great joy and amusement, riots bring nothing but fear, anxiety and despair for the people. Furthermore, the involvement of the audience in theatre is wilful, whereas large numbers of people are caught up in the riot situation against their will. The characterization of Hindu–Muslim riots in the metaphor of drama or theatre is not only an over-simplification but a grotesque distortion of communal violence.

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Review of Paul Brass

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Paul Brass's *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (2003) is an empirically rich and theoretically ambitious work. In this brief review, I wish to address only one issue, but an issue that is central to the book – agency. By agency, I mean two things: actors possess a range of options and they actively and consciously choose among this range of options. If actors have only one realistic option, if they follow one option unconsciously or if the options have been obfuscated or manipulated, then the actors do not possess agency.

Brass's work is centered on the agents behind communal violence, not on the larger structural, economic, and demographic factors behind them. His essential question is 'on *how* riots are produced rather than on *why* they happen' (p. 16). Claiming to eschew causal analysis, Brass states, 'All that the social scientist can reasonably achieve in such situations is to expose to full view, as far as possible, the agents involved in the production of collective violence and the interests that are served by those who seek to capture its meaning' (p. 387).

With these goals in mind, Brass focuses his study on an 'intermediate space' between the general public and the state. In this space, Brass locates the agents who create the conditions for riots. Brass repeatedly turns to a metaphor in which riots are likened to 'dramatic productions, street theater performances that are meant to appear spontaneous, but involve many people in a variety of roles and actions that include inciting the people of the audience, the dramatization and enlargement of incidents into a fit subject for performance, and, finally, the production of events' (p. 358). Collective violence in India is the result of institutionalized riot systems which include a plethora of roles – informants, propagandists, vernacular journalists, rumor mongers, recruiters, thugs, and crucially 'fire tenders' who bring incidents to notice and 'conversion specialists' who give the signal for violence. For Brass, these are the agents of riots and the social scientist should expose them. The riot system is embedded within a broader communal discourse and persists partly due to a weak state, but to focus attention there is to abdicate the search for agency – the specific who and how – in order to fruitlessly chase after explanations based on broad causal forces and psychological states which only serve to obfuscate and displace blame.

The metaphor of riot as dramatic production or street theater performance is a vivid one, but it raises some questions about agency. In particular, what about the agency of the audience? Why, particularly in a democracy,

does the audience keep showing up for this violent dramatic production? Brass argues that ‘The people of Aligarh, like devotees of theater, are kept in a state of readiness for the next production through advertising of all kinds of trivial incidents that hold the promise of a great drama to follow’ (p. 358). This passage, and many others, suggests very little agency for members of the audience. They are ‘kept’, and apparently easily ‘kept’. In this work, riots lead to increased communal solidarity that in turn affects political competition, especially elections, in ways that benefit a small elite. If Brass really wishes to concentrate on agency, he needs to better explain to the reader (especially one not familiar with Indian society and politics), how the audience appears to be ‘kept’ in a desired state by what appear to be the same tactics time and time again and why the audience accepts the same post-riot framing devices over and over.

Other scholars writing on Indian politics do not provide such a Pavlovian portrait of Indian mass society. In Kanchan Chandra’s recent *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Chandra, 2004), Indian voters are rational and strategic actors who cannot always be swayed by emotional ethnic appeals. More directly on the issue of riots, Ashutosh Varshney’s *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (2002) argues that members of Indian society have the resources and the power to prevent collective violence through local networks of civic engagement. Brass quickly brushes aside Varshney’s work. He states that Varshney’s method leads him to ‘a doubtful conclusion that civic engagement between Hindus and Muslims can prevent violence, when it is more likely that the creation of institutionalized riot systems overrides and displaces whatever forms of civic engagement and interethnic cooperation exist at specific sites’ (p. 27). In Brass’s treatment, societal resistance against a well-oiled riot system seems almost futile. Indeed, Indian citizens, locked into continual blame displacement are not even able to see communal violence as a fundamental violation of their most basic democratic values (p. 24).

If the audience does not possess agency, who does? The bit players in the dramatic production of riots do not seem likely candidates. As Brass mentions, they are ‘always ready to come out for a fracas’ (p. 358). Their response is even more predictable and automatic than the audience’s. The actors who do seem to have a clear ability to define their own interests and act on them are local political elites, especially those wishing to affect elections, and the police. Brass’s treatment of the police in the Chapter 14 shows a sophisticated and capable actor. Brass summarizes: ‘It was a matter of some surprise to me to find that local police inspectors and station officers in the *mohallas* of Aligarh in the riot-prone areas expressed their views on riots very coherently, fully, articulately, and sensitively, with many nuances’ (p. 333). The police are not easily fooled by statements of political elites. They could also prevent riots if they possessed the will to do so. But this is

just the point. The police have agency, but, as a Hindu-dominated organization, appear to have little will to use it. This brings us back to the more general point about agency behind communal violence in India.

Brass invokes Merton's functionalism to describe the persistence of riot systems. Like political machines seen previously in the United States, the system possesses momentum of its own. The system can maintain itself so long as no powerful party has a reason to destroy it. No powerful agent need be behind the perpetuation of the machine or system. This reference is apt. Although Brass wishes to discuss agency, there is not much agency in this book. Institutionalized riot systems destroy the agency of the mass and its voters, provide steady employment for marginal bit players and fail to provoke a reaction from the police. Riots are a routinized form of 'politics by other means' that elites fall back on as a default option instead of using their intelligence and imagination.

However, Brass's book suggests another possibility about agency. Perhaps there are forces that affect actors in similar ways and create common preferences. Then it may not be that a small political elite is manipulating and obfuscating action as much as all actors are consciously and willingly deciding to participate or support communal violence. The power of the overarching Hindu-Muslim discourse may be such a force. While the presence of institutionalized riot systems may explain much of the variation in the time and place of riots, the high number of riots and their persistence would seem better explained by the larger forces that Brass would wish to avoid. Brass himself recognizes the power of a Hindu ideology that seethes at Hindu displacement from a rightful position of dominance. In fact, he concludes that, 'In this world, the riots that comprise my theme and subject are but specks in a much bigger frame' (p. 327). If this is the case, then it may be that the audience, the bit players, the politicians, the police are not driven by a largely concealed riot system that operates on deception. Rather, the power and pervasiveness of this communal discourse aligns the preferences of all these actors in the same direction. Many actors in north India and in riot-prone areas such as Aligarh – elite and mass, criminal and police – may be pursuing interests in full knowledge of their consequences. They know that they have a range of options, they understand the consequences of their actions, they are not being manipulated. They participate in the violence because they want to, because larger cultural and structural forces compel them to participate or tolerate riots. In discussing the infamous events involved with the destruction of the Mosque at Ayodhya, Brass writes, 'the evidence of preplanning was overwhelming and the personal satisfaction of all those I saw and interviewed after the fact can only be described as joyous' (p. 355). But Brass does not wish to pursue the puzzle of how a wide strata of the population can come to experience such common joy about collective violence.

While Brass wishes to avoid assigning causal properties to vague historical processes and large structural changes, other social scientists place this widespread joy within such contours. For instance, Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph (1993) saw the Ayodha events corresponding to a rise and challenge to traditional Hindu dominance. They wrote of these new forces:

Such mobility is unhooking a severely hierarchical society, creating social stress bred of envy and resentment. Old established Hindu middle classes, mostly from the upper literate and landed castes, suddenly see a whole range of Johnny-come-latelies at their side who only yesterday were their inferiors in status and income, both low-caste folks and Muslims. (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1993)

While Brass does give us a sense of the power of India's Hindu–Muslim discourse, we get little sense in his book of how the structural shifts and their political effects discussed by the Rudolphs might motivate action in combination with this powerful discourse. Although Brass recognizes widespread joy at violence, he holds an absolute aversion to discussing psychology. Brass writes of his approach: (A)ll forms of deep psychological interpretation of individual motivations for participation in riotous activity will be eschewed as essentially futile; instead the focus will be on the hidden face itself, what can be made visible behind the mask of discourse' (p. 17). However, the forces described by the Rudolph's do not seem so 'deep' or unfathomable. One also wonders whether the discourse is so hidden, whether the mass of individuals and voters are so easily fooled, whether the bit players don't really have something else to do. When one looks at the overwhelming power of the communal discourse since the 1947 partition and considers the visible structural and demographic forces at work in Indian society that can combine and shape the direction of this force, one might also wonder why we have to avoid causal analysis, why we need to spend our time 'looking behind a mask'. Perhaps we should look for individuals and organizations pursuing more obvious interests and we should look for institutional solutions to the problem of communal violence.

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Response to reviews by Thomas Hansen, A.R. Momin, and Roger Petersen

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RESPONSE TO THOMAS HANSEN

The review by Thomas Hansen is of the kind that every serious scholar should hope for, namely, one written by someone who has himself done first-rate research on the subject, that gives a fair treatment of the work as a whole, understands the arguments fully and raises at the same time difficult questions that deserve a response, further discussion and additional research. First, to the question of the absence in my work of a discussion of riot systems among Muslims in Aligarh. In many, if not most riots, violence certainly occurs between the local populations of Hindus and Muslims in adjacent *mohallas*. However, the core element of riot participation on the Muslim side was virtually obliterated with the extra-judicial execution of more than 40 alleged Muslim criminals, who were taken outside the city limits and shot in 1979 during the incumbency of the Senior Superintendent of Police, B.P. Singh. Even allowing for Muslim involvement in riot production, however, it is the case that the systematic production of Hindu–Muslim riots for the last quarter century or more, with differences from city to city, has been a specialty of the militant Hindu organizations, who have the largest share of responsibility for most of them that I know of.

How do riots get started without a pre-existing system of riot production? I have shown how riots have become both more organized, more deadly and more spatially extended, especially during the three decades from 1961 to 1991 when the system was at its most active. The spatial extension from the center of the city to outlying areas previously untouched by such riots has required the recruitment of riot specialists and criminal groups from particular *mohallas* in the city to attack Muslims in these outlying areas.

With regard to the effects of national political movements upon local communal conflict and violence, it depends upon local factors, upon how well organized the local system is, and upon the political context, that is, the local electoral advantage to be gained from fomenting riots during a broader political mobilization.

Finally, on the question of political rationality, passion, and ideology in the production of riots. I accept that a considerable part of the Hindu population, especially of the upper castes, are imbued with intense nationalist feelings that include a dislike for, even a passionate hatred of, the Muslim population of the country that is blamed for the partition of India in 1947. Nevertheless, political rationality on the part of the principal riot producers is critical: the ends in view are clear, the prospects of success reasonable enough to make the effort worthwhile, and the results often enough precisely what are desired.

RESPONSE TO A.R. MOMIN

Concerning my use and critique of causal analysis. I do not reject completely the attempt to find causal linkages and connections. But I do reject the often mindless, fruitless, and blame displacing misuses of causal analysis in political science and sociology.

I do not assume or imply that 'all forms of violence in the world are fundamentally alike'. But, it also seems to me, and has seemed to others who have read my work, that my arguments concerning organization, preparation, planning, and deliberation are relevant to several forms of collective violence, and that my concept of 'institutionalized riot systems' may have some bearing even in the extreme cases of genocide, as for example, in Rwanda and Burundi.

It is true that I have found Mertonian functionalism a more useful form of explanation of one kind of question that is not addressed satisfactorily by any form of causal analysis, namely, how does one explain the *persistence* of forms of social or political organization or practices that are universally condemned in society. I concede that the implication that Indian society as a whole may benefit from the persistence of riots was misleadingly phrased, but my elaboration of the argument in the rest of the book is what should matter, namely, that the existence of so-called Hindu-Muslim conflict has been used as a justification for a strong state in India to retain the unity of the country in the face of its internal conflicts.

I have made it as clear as can be in the book that any local administration with a competent and effective district magistrate and senior superintendent of police, with the backing of the state government, can prevent and/or stop quickly any of the riots of the type that have been common in northern

and western India. As for civic action, it was hardly present in Aligarh during the 30-year period under investigation.

Case studies are most valuable for the purposes for which I have used them in this book and in my other writings on this subject, namely, the uncovering of the dynamic processes involved in riot production rather than demonstrating universal causal relationships. It is wrong to suggest that Aligarh is a unique, exceptional case of riot production in India. On the contrary, I have demonstrated in my own work before and since this book the existence of systems of institutionalized riot production in Kanpur City and Meerut. It is the Bhiwandi case that is exceptional. As for Surat, Dr Arup Singh, at the University of Delhi has, in fact, already gone to that city, has written about it in his PhD dissertation, and has found that my arguments work quite well there. In any case, if one wants to know 'how riots can be effectively averted or prevented', one has first to know how they are produced. Moreover, I have presented adequate evidence on the subject of riot control and prevention in this book itself, as stated above.

Contrary to Momin's statement, the Gujarat case illustrates the correctness of my argument as perfectly as one could imagine. One may read my analysis of it in the epilogue to the book as well as in an article published in *Items* (Brass, 2002–03).

Momin finds my metaphor of a drama to describe the rehearsal, production, and interpretation phases in the process of riot production 'grotesque'. My abhorrence of the whole process of riot production is clear enough in everything I have written. My metaphor of drama in no way underplays it.

RESPONSE TO ROGER PETERSEN

Petersen skews his entire review to a discussion of the notion of agency. I argue very strongly in this and all my other work that deliberate, purposive, directed actions by self-conscious persons and organizations (agents) are at the root of all forms of collective violence. My focus in this book, as Petersen notes correctly, is on the intermediate space of action between popular sentiments and state action. Yet, he faults me for not focusing attention on the space occupied by popular sentiments. In other words, rather than discuss my book and its focus, he criticizes me for not writing the book of his choice. In the process, moreover, he distorts my meaning, which is most certainly *not* to argue that the general public lacks voice, agency, and purpose.

Petersen's distortion of my arguments is most apparent where he makes much of my use of the word 'kept', where, drawing upon my metaphor of a staged drama, I say that the people of Aligarh are kept in a state of readiness for the next production. Among the 32 meanings of the words 'keep' and 'kept' in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, the meaning to be

attached to my use of the term here is that the general public in such cities *awaits*, that is, *anticipates*, and often breathlessly, the next riot event, not as passive persons, but as individuals who are not in fact in control of the events, but must prepare their own ways of coping with, or participating in them.

Petersen also imagines me to have written things that I have not, that I say that the purpose of keeping the audience in a state of readiness is to ‘benefit a small elite’. Neither this phrase nor anything conveying such a meaning is to be found in my book.

Petersen goes on with his extraordinary portrayal of my book by alleging that I have provided ‘a Pavlovian portrait’ to be compared unfavorably with the work of other India specialists. Kanchan Chandra’s cited work (Chandra, 2004) has nothing to do with collective violence. With regard to Varshney’s (2002) work, I have noted its deficiencies in my book, and at greater length elsewhere. The Rudolphs (1993) have done no work on collective violence, but he finds a sentence of theirs in an article written for a news magazine on a different subject that supports his own point of view.

Finally, Petersen presents my broader argument concerning the critical role of the discourse of Hindu–Muslim enmity, the militant Hindu nationalist ideology, the pervasiveness of feelings of *ressentiment*, and the ways in which individuals, groups and organizations pursue their political aims and interests within, or in relation to, these discursive frameworks and feelings, as if they were his own, criticizing me for not doing so! This is warped criticism.

What is agent Petersen’s purpose in this review? Who knows? But perhaps it is to justify his own work on interethnic violence, in which he relies on emotional explanations, based on envy and resentment, presented in a mechanical, rational choice, oversimplified, over-determined way as the causal wheels upon which everything else turns.

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