

5. Riots and Rituals: The Construction of Violence and Public Space in Hindu Nationalism

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INTRODUCTION

Riots and rituals are both often seen as instances of behavior without meaning or purpose. They are portrayed as closed universes in which every move relates to another move, but not rationally and purposefully to a world outside of them.¹ In this respect they look like games. There is also quite an opposite interpretation which tends to emphasize the spontaneity of riots and unpredictability of ritual performances which distinguishes them from rule oriented behavior like games.

However, riots in India I have witnessed or read about were more often than not well-planned and had well-defined targets and rules. In some cases you know exactly when and where to expect them to begin and end, as if they were rituals. Similarly, rituals I have studied in India showed intentional, rational behavior which was moulded and interpreted in the ritual process itself. We might suggest that both riots and rituals are meaningful and purposeful sets of actions. They are comparable in their organization of symbolic space, in their temporal structure and in their symbolic repertoire.²

Riots and rituals both appear to play a significant role in the construction of social identities. Since Durkheim anthropologists have been concerned with the ritual construction of social (group-) identity. Often a classification of rituals is made which reflects levels of social integration. Rituals like ancestor worship relate to community in a narrow sense (household, lineage, clan), while rituals like pilgrimage relate to community in a wider sense (nation, community of believers).³ In an important book on the emergence of communalism in colonial North India Sandria Freitag emphasizes the importance of collective, symbolic activities in what she calls "public arenas." She shows that riots and rituals were actually linked in the construction of "communal" identities in public space.⁴ There is indeed a strong association of identity and public space in both riots and rituals. Thus, for example,

the importance of spatial interpenetration of “Hindu” and “Muslim” groups (or lack of such interpenetration) has been clearly shown in the dynamics of rioting in a number of places.

A direct connection between ritual performances in public space and riots seems also obvious in contemporary India. Ritual processions through “troubled” areas often end in full-scale riots. What we seem to have here are “rituals of provocation.”⁵ A whole symbolic repertoire, derived from the ritual realm of animal sacrifice, is often used to start a riot: a slaughtered cow in a Hindu sacred space or a slaughtered pig in a Muslim sacred space. Of course, the “troubles” relate to all kinds of contextual circumstances of an economic and political nature, such as competition between shopkeepers, the power of bootleggers, the communal activities of the police, the active leadership of politicians in riots. They may, indeed, on a higher level of abstraction be fundamentally related to changing projects of a centralizing state. Without in the least discounting such elements in the genesis, development and outcome of riots, I want to suggest that riots provide a ritual space in which subjectivity, and its relation to state power, is discursively constructed. Public space does not only pattern ideas of community, but is itself, to an important extent, constructed through ritual and rioting. The spatial factor is as much a result as a basis of conceptions of community.

Freitag shows a connection between riots and rituals in modern India, but focuses on the local community, while nationalism is the phenomenon in which she is interested. It is therefore important to look beyond the rituals of the local community to pilgrimage, which bridges the local and the wider community (the nation). Pilgrimage is often seen to reflect a supra-local level of integration. It reinforces “the larger moral community of the civilization.”⁶ A classic statement of this function is made in an article by Wolf on the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, which “links together family, politics and religion; colonial past and independent present; Indian and Mexican ... It is, ultimately, a way of talking about Mexico: a collective representation of Mexican society.”⁷ In a similar vein, Srinivas writes about Hindu sacred centers as the places in which the Great Sanskritic Tradition is transmitted to the peasants of the region: “Every great temple and pilgrim centre was a source of Sanskritization, and the periodic festivals or other occasions when pilgrims gathered together at the centre provided opportunities for the spread of Sanskritic ideas and beliefs.”⁸ While Srinivas’ analysis refers to civilizational integration, Mandelbaum makes a somewhat different, but related analytical move by arguing that pilgrimage acts to create national identification and thus plays a role in nation-building:

There is a traditional basis for the larger national identification. It is the idea, mainly engendered by Hindu religion but shared by those of other religions as well, that there is an entity of India to which all inhabitants belong. The Hindu epics and legends, in their manifold versions, teach that the stage for the gods was nothing less than the entire land and that the land remains one religious setting for those who dwell in it. That sense was and is continually confirmed through the common practice of pilgrimage.⁹

That pilgrimage is always a ritual of the wider community is in some sense a truism. By definition, it involves a journey from one's village or town to a sacred center and back and its performance seems to reinforce the notion of a wider community of believers. This ritual seems then to lend itself eminently for linkage to the discourses and ritual practices of religious nationalism (communalism). What we might consider is the possibility that pilgrimage in India, based on linkages between distant regions, provided notions of religious community long before the British entered the scene. Information and ideas went from one part of India to another and, in case of the Muslims, even from Mecca to India and vice versa.

There is no doubt that the nineteenth century brought great transformations to Indian society which were reflected in the public arena of pilgrimage. Especially the improvement of infrastructure enabled more and more people to perform pilgrimage. Also, the emergence of a relatively secure class of landowners and bureaucrats resulted in a greatly expanded patronage of religious institutions, such as pilgrimage centers. Finally, Western discourse on the nation as a territorially based community colluded with religious discourse on sacred space.

The importance of pilgrimage and sacred centers in the (re)definition of community in India becomes clear when we consider the various struggles for control in these arenas. In some cases these are struggles primarily within a religious community, such as the Gurdwara Reform movement among the Sikhs in the 1920s which tried to reallocate control over Sikh temples. In other cases these are struggles between the state and religious elites, such as the struggle for control over Hindu temples in South India.¹⁰ And again there are struggles between communities over the control over sacred space, such as between Hindus and Muslims in the case of Ayodhya.

What theories of pilgrimage which emphasize integration¹¹ tend to neglect is that violent antagonism may be an important mechanism of integration. It is through the construction and maintenance of boundaries between "us" and "them" that group identities are shaped. While the ritual process integrates individuals in a community of worshippers, it sets it apart from those who

do not worship. Moreover, in a number of cases, it tends to portray "the other" as "demonic," "threatening" and "impure." Such conceptualizations can imply ritual action to exorcize, subjugate or conquer the "alien presence." Moreover, the "alien" elements may be understood to be both "within" the self and "outside" of it, so that violence is directed simultaneously to discipline the self and conquer the "other." In that sense antagonistic violence can be an integral part of the ritual process.

As Maurice Bloch has shown in his study of circumcision rituals among the Merina in Madagascar, the powers of nature which are present in the "self" are not replaced by the ancestral powers of the elders, but violently conquered and appropriated by the elders who perform the circumcision on new members of the society. In this way the cultural conquest of natural powers establishes the authority of elders which can in turn be appropriated by the state. Bloch suggests that the violence of the ritual conquest of nature is directly connected to the legitimation and motivation in warfare against "others," outside of society.¹²

When we turn our attention to the phenomenon of nationalism it is important to consider Bruce Kapferer's notion that nationalist discourse feeds upon the cultural logic of everyday practice.¹³ The "demonization" of another ethnic group by portraying it as a threat to the integrity of one's cultural identity and thus as a matter of life and death can only be understood in its cultural specifics by relating it to particular orientations to the world. The ritual nature of riots and the riotous nature of ritual are thus connected through discursive traditions on the nature of the "self" and the "other." These traditions are not homogeneous or monolithic, but are subject to constant debate (sometimes of a violent nature) in cultural arenas.

The above discussion leads to the following arguments about the connection between riots and rituals. The first is that an important function of ritual is to construct the identity of the participants as a religious community. In the modern period, religious discourse on the community is directly linked to the discourse of nationalism. The second is that the ritual construction of identity often implies actual violence and antagonism. It does so by providing an arena in which the "self" is constructed by opposition to an "other" that is demonized and violently conquered. While some of this violence is directed inward to discipline the members of a community, part of it may be directed outward to members of other communities in the form of riots. Instead of being spontaneous outbursts of passions, riots can thus be seen as a form of ritual antagonism through which a community expresses its identity. Rather than being meaningless and irrational, I would propose that

riots and rituals are both forms of behavior through which people communicate their identity and their understanding of the world.

Finally, I want to suggest that both riots and rituals derive their meaning from the way they relate identities to public space. That is to say that although the actual occurrences of communal riots, separated in time and place, resemble each other in form and contextual explanation¹⁴ – as do indeed ritual performances – their meaning has to be historically understood in terms of discursive shifts.¹⁵ As far as I am able to see now, there has been a major discursive shift in the nineteenth century through the linkage of sacred space and national territory.

In the pre-colonial period, Hindu notions of sacred space were connected to pilgrimage and centers of regional devotion. These notions connected certain groups of Hindus to certain places and involved violent struggles between groups of specialists for control over scarce resources. However, they referred to discontinuity between sacred spots and secular routes to reach them and to discontinuity among the people who go to visit them. The notion of continuous territory which is sacralized as the “motherland” is clearly different from these earlier understandings and belongs to the modern discourse of nationalism which reaches India in the nineteenth century. What seems to have happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that the discourse on nation and territory was discursively linked to the ritual construction of sacred space. Riots and rituals become then performances which derive their meaning from a discourse on communal identity. As we will see, this is not only a matter of interpretation, but also of innovative practice. It seems obvious that the rituals of Hindu nationalism are innovations which are consciously designed to have riotous consequences.

I want to illustrate the above arguments by looking somewhat closely at a few selected religious conflicts over the past three centuries in Ayodhya, a Hindu pilgrimage centre in North India. This place has gained considerable notoriety over the last decade, since it has become the main source of conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India. In 1984, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, a Hindu nationalist movement, started a campaign to remove a mosque, built in the sixteenth century, from a place which it considered the birthplace of the God Rama. The issue was made central in the national political arena by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party with a long history in Hindu nationalism. In the general elections in May and June, 1991 the BJP gained again considerably and has become the second party in India after the Congress party.¹⁶

I want to place the current issue in the context of a series of historical confrontations in Ayodhya. In this way I can demonstrate how changing historical configurations have led to shifting notions of violence, space and identity.

VIOLENCE IN SACRED SPACE¹⁷

There is a strong tendency among both outsiders and Hindus to present Hinduism as an exception to the general picture of religious violence. Hinduism is often characterized as "tolerant." I would suggest that this characterization has a specific orientalist history. "Religious tolerance" as an ideal in the West derives from an abstraction and universalization of religion which is part of a Western discourse on "modernity." The move in seventeenth-century Europe to produce a universal definition of Natural Religion as existing in all societies shows a fragmentation of the unity and authority of the Roman Church, but also the rise of new discourses and practices connected to modern nation-states.¹⁸ A growing emphasis on religious tolerance as a positive value is thus related to the marginalization of religious institutions in Europe. This discourse is brought to bear on the Muslim and Hindu populations incorporated in the modern world-system. Muslims are labeled as "fanatic" and "bigoted," while Hindus are seen in a more positive light as "tolerant." At the same time, this labelling explains why Muslims have ruled Hindu India and why Hindus have to be "protected" by the British. The attribution of "tolerance" to Hinduism has come to dominate Hindu discourse on Hinduism to the extent that tolerance is now one of the most important characteristics of Hinduism, while as a doctrinal notion it had no specific place in Hindu discursive traditions before the nineteenth century.

Much of what I have just said about "tolerance" could also be applied to concepts like Gandhi's "non-violence" or the social egalitarianism of Hindu devotional groups. It is sometimes difficult for westerners to grasp violence perpetrated by Hindu monks¹⁹ (*sadhus*) who speak and act militantly, since there is the persistent notion of "non-violent" other-worldliness attributed to Hindu "spirituality." Again, while "non-violence" had a place in Hindu discursive traditions as a rejection of the violence of animal sacrifice, which has resulted in vegetarianism among some groups, the idea that Hindus would be religiously prevented from pursuing their interests by violent means is Gandhi's construction of Hindu spirituality. Especially Hindu monks have a long and interesting history of warfare related to trading which continues to the present day.²⁰ It is modern Hinduism which ignores these traditions in its self-presentation through the mirror of the West while,

at the same time, manifesting a behavior which is not “non-violent” or “tolerant” by any stretch of the imagination.

The symbolism of antagonism and violent conquest is also very clearly present in the case of the devotional worship of Rama, with which I am concerned in this paper. Gods wage a continuous war with demons, the powers of evil. The *Ramayana*, the central text of the Rama devotion and Hinduism’s most important religious saga tells the story of Rama’s struggle with the demons and his ultimate victory. This story is continuously told by story-tellers, enacted in religious dramas, such as the Ram Lila, and has recently been the subject of a most successful soap-opera on Indian television. The places connected to the Rama story are important centers of pilgrimage.

Vishnu takes the incarnation (*avatara*) of Rama, the son of Ayodhya’s king, to save the world from the growing power of demons. He travels throughout India to Lanka in a tour of royal conquest. It is this freedom of movement – by removing every obstacle to it – which symbolizes Hindu notions of sovereignty. Finally, he launches with his army of monkeys an attack on Lanka and slays all the demons. Returning to Ayodhya he becomes the paradigmatic just king (*dharmaraja*) who preserves the purity of the caste order and the chastity of women. It is his rule (*Ramraj*) which serves as a political ideal in Hindu political thought.

The devotional worship of Rama is one of the most important strands in contemporary Hinduism, at least from the sixteenth century. The most important element in the spread of a particular kind of Rama devotion in North India has undoubtedly been the sixteenth-century Hindi rendition of the *Ramayana* by Tulsī Das. This text has become the basis for both popular and theological interpretation of Rama devotion. Although Tulsī Das was probably not a Ramanandi himself, his story has been much promoted by the Ramanandis, who spread from Rajasthan to other parts of North India during the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ramanandis had established themselves in holy places connected with episodes in the Rama story, such as Janakpur in the Nepalese Tarai, and Ayodhya and Chitrakut in Uttar Pradesh. Although the monks settled in Ayodhya at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ayodhya became the main center of the order only in the nineteenth century. Ramanandis now form the majority of Ayodhya’s population.

The establishment of the Ramanandis in Ayodhya did not happen without a great deal of conflict. The Ramanandis are known for their organization in military bands (*jamat, khalsa*). In the eighteenth century, they were further organized in armies (*ani*) and regiments (*akhara*). Their main competitors were not Muslims, as modern Hindu writing often has it, but followers of the other great Hindu god, Shiva. Together, these monks controlled much

of the trade routes of North India – which doubled as pilgrimage routes – and they became organized in armies to fight against each other. Ramanandi oral history has it that Ayodhya was in the hands of their rivals, the Shaivas, before they had established themselves. The first written account about a conflict in Ayodhya indeed concerns a violent confrontation between Shaivas and Ramanandis. *Shrimaharajacaritra*, a hagiography of the important abbot Ramprasad (1703–1804), written by Ragunathprasad in 1804–5, describes a violent confrontation in the early eighteenth century in which Shaiva monks still prevailed over Ramanandis.

It should be clear that this kind of conflict involved religious specialists seeking to expand their control over religious centers and pilgrimage/trading networks. It did not involve clashes between religious communities, between “Hindus” and “Muslims.” The rivals were Ramanandi and Shaiva monks, both “Hindu” groups, though occasionally other monks may also have joined the fray. The conflicts had certainly a “religious” aspect. Often, they are described as involving not only weaponry and fighting, but spiritual powers, derived from ascetic practices. The curse of an ascetic was considered a weapon perhaps more dangerous than a matchlock. Control over sacred space had clearly economic and political consequences, but it also showed spiritual superiority.

In the case of Ayodhya, the Ramanandis succeeded in establishing their dominance. However, it is important to note that they could build temples in Ayodhya only with the explicit permission of the Muslim rulers of the area. Ayodhya certainly constituted sacred space, eulogized in pilgrimage manuals and ritually established by annual circumambulation. At the same time, however, Ayodhya was the capital of a province (*suba*) in the Mughal empire. The struggle between Hindu ascetics for control over sacred space did not in the least challenge the sovereignty of the Shi’a Nawabs of Awadh. Ultimately, it was only through tax-free land grants that the ascetics could settle in Ayodhya and start to build temples. For example, Safdar Jang (r. 1739–54) gave land to Abhayaramdas, abbot of the Nirwani *akhara*, for building Hanumangarhi, which is now the most important temple in Ayodhya. The removal of the Nawabi administration first from Ayodhya to Faizabad and then to Lucknow is often interpreted as the liberation of a Hindu sacred place from Muslim oppression in Hindu historical writing. Clearly, the contrary is the case, since Ayodhya rose as a Hindu pilgrimage center in direct relation with the expansion of the Nawabi realm and with direct support from the Nawabi court.²¹

The complexities of the relationship between the Nawabi court and the Ramanandis in Ayodhya is shown in the next important instance of violence between religious groups, of which we have written evidence. There was a

dispute about a mosque before the British took over the realm of the Nawabs of Awadh in 1856, but this mosque was not the Babari Masjid, the current bone of contention, but a mosque which was allegedly in the most important Hindu temple in Ayodhya, Hanumangarhi. The conflict led, however, to a Hindu assault on what must have been the most important mosque near Hanumangarhi, which is now universally known as the Babari Masjid, but might then have been simply known as the Jama Masjid.²²

The 1855 dispute is confusing for those interested in the current Babri Masjid conflict. Most commentators today take it for granted that the 1855 dispute had been about the Babari Masjid in the first place. One can understand the confusion. While now all attention is given to a conflict about a mosque which occupied the place of a temple, the conflict in 1855 was about a temple occupying the place of a mosque. Indeed, no party in the conflict nowadays even mentions a disputed site in Hanumangarhi and from today's perspective it seems difficult to imagine that a bunch of Muslim militants would launch an attack on Hanumangarhi, a huge fortified temple, with the belief that they should repossess their sacred space. Nevertheless, this was indeed the case in the mid-nineteenth century.

The god worshipped in Hanumangarhi is, of course, now unequivocally incorporated within Ramanandi ritual practice, but this has not always been so. Local tradition has it that the god worshipped on the hill on which the Ramanandis built Hanumangarhi was indeed Hanuman, who was worshipped by both Shaivite *sanyasis* and Sufi *faqirs* under the name Hathile.²³ The Ramanandis had to chase these competitors first before they could claim the place and the worshipped aniconic stone as their own. This struggle is recounted in local tradition. I would suggest that it was such a tradition in the nineteenth century on which the belief of Muslims was based that within the precincts of Hanumangarhi a sacred place could be located which belonged to them.

That Muslim militants could launch an attack on such a well-entrenched Hindu bulwark as Hanumangarhi has to be understood in its broader political context. The attackers were Sunnis under the leadership of Shah Ghulam Husayn, a religious scholar (*maulvi*). Ayodhya belonged to Awadh, a regional realm governed by Shi'ite rulers since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The defeat and massacre of the Muslim militants by Hindu *sadhus* (and their supporters, local landowners) compromised the Islamic legitimacy of Shi'ite rule which was always under threat of rejection by Sunnis, the majority among the Muslim population. In an interesting move, the chief religious official among the Shi'ite population of Awadh argued that a Muslim state had to put an end to the wickedness of the infidels.²⁴

This instance shows clearly the predicament of a Muslim ruler confronted with communal violence. The predicament of Vajid Ali Shah, the ruler of Awadh, was, however, worsened by the fact that he had not only to avoid hurting Muslim feelings, but also was effectively dependent on the political support and consent of the British resident in Lucknow who took to the defense of the Hindus. A government commission was formed, which concluded that no mosque existed in Hanumangarhi. This led to violent demonstrations among Muslims. Maulvi Amir Ali Amethavi called for a holy war and organized an army to march on Ayodhya. Now the chief Shi'ite religious official declared this a forbidden act when it was not supported by the state. In effect, he ruled against popular action of Sunnis in a Shi'ite state. The Shi'ite ruler had the prerogative to protect the Islamic Law. When the holy warriors decided to ignore the warnings of the Shi'ite government and marched on Ayodhya, they were confronted by government troops and massacred. Soon after these events the British decided to take over the administration of Awadh by making it a province of British India.

The 1855 dispute throws light on a complex configuration. No doubt, there was a communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims about sacred space. However, this conflict also involved conflictual interactions between Shi'as and Sunnis in their relations with the Hindu population. Disenfranchised Sunnis wanted to take political action against Hindus when they felt that the Shi'ite state was not protecting Muslims or advancing Islam. The capability of the Shi'ite state to do so was, however, limited by its dependence on the British. Moreover, the Shi'a rulers of Awadh had also always depended on support from Hindu elites whom they wished not to alienate. In fact, as we have seen, many of Ayodhya's temples – Hanumangarhi is one of them – had been built with donations from Hindu officials in Awadh's Shi'ite government.

In a way, the British interference caused the collapse of the delicate balance the Shi'ite rulers had to keep. When they finally took formal control in 1856, the British understood that it was their foremost task to police and control communal relations. Since the Hanumangarhi issue had effectively dissolved, they focused on the other potential site of conflict, the Babari Masjid. By placing a railing, they materially and symbolically divided the worshippers in the Babari Masjid compound.

The Babari Masjid became now a sacred space symbolizing the antagonism between two "nations," "Hindus" and "Muslims," rather than one of the elements in a complex configuration of power, in which Shi'a rulers and Sunni and Ramanandi religious specialists found themselves in a delicate balance. While till the nineteenth century Rama devotion had to be violently defended against Shaivite Hindus, after the British annexation of Awadh it came to

be linked to the discourse of Hindu nationalism which defined Muslims as the eternal enemy.

RITUALS OF NATIONALISM

While there can be no doubt that the religious history of India, prior to the establishment of British colonial rule, had been as violent as religious histories elsewhere in the world, it is also true that the scope and the nature of violence, related to religious beliefs and practices, changed when they came to be related to the discourse of nationalism. There are at least two notions of crucial importance in this shift. The first is the notion of "territory". The second is the notion of "representation". A polity characterized by hierarchical relations between elites and subjects was transformed by the notion of the nation-state, in which the state is the instrument of the political will of the majority of equal citizens. While the earlier polity was characterized by discontinuity in the hierarchical relations between centers and peripheries, the modern nation-state is characterized by territory, a continuous tract of land. As Dumont argues, the modern nation is the collection of individuals and their properties.²⁵ The sovereignty of the nation depends on the sacrality of its territory, marked by its borders. As Anderson shows,²⁶ this notion of territory, marked by borders, imagined as continuous map-lines, is modern, introduced into nineteenth century Asia by colonialism.

When we see the importance of the notion of "territory" for the definition of the nation, it should not surprise us that it is grafted on earlier notions of "sacred space." This linkage is brought out with admirable clarity in an oft-cited passage in Veer Savarkar's *Hindutva*: "A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharat Varsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle of his religion."²⁷ However, it was only through political ritual that this sense of territory could be made real in people's imagination of national belonging.

The first important supra-local movement to succeed in creating a sense of a Hindu nation as opposed to Muslims and the British was the Cow Protection Movement in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Anand Yang (1980) has shown, large numbers of people were mobilized through the networks of local marketing systems. In the case of Saran District in Bihar, on which Yang focuses,²⁸ it was the transit of cattle intended for slaughter which led to widespread rioting. Not only cattle was on the move, but Hindu monks travelled the countryside as well to organize people against the slaughter of the Cow-Goddess. Circular letters (*patias*) were used to spread the message of the Hindu nation.²⁹ While the movement to protect Mother

Cow from Muslim butchers and British barbarians concentrated on the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, riots also took place elsewhere, notably in Calcutta and Bombay. The great "success" of the Bombay cow protection riot of 1893 led Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Maharashtrian Hindu leader, to continue to develop new ritual strategies for mass mobilization.³⁰ The most striking among those was the reinvention of the festival for Ganapati, the elephant-headed Hindu God, and a series of rituals connected to the all-but-forgotten founder of the Maratha empire, Shivaji (1627–80). The direct connection between these rituals and communal riots is perfectly clear from Douglas Haynes' work on colonial Surat.

The first series of communal riots in Surat took place in 1927 as a result of processions held to commemorate the birthday of Shivaji, who symbolized "the common heritage of the Hindus." A second series of riots followed the next year after processions celebrating the Hindu god Ganapati.³¹ The "catchment area" of these ritual innovations, however, was more limited than that of the Cow Protection Movement. It remained largely restricted to Western India, what is now known as the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

It is probably fair to say that it was Gandhi's political genius which allowed the Independence Movement to gain "nationwide" attention in his celebrated Salt March. In March 1929, Gandhi set off on his month-long, 240-mile pilgrimage to the coastal town of Dandi, where he would make salt from the sea. Seventy-eight carefully selected male supporters accompanied him, representing different regions, religions and castes. By ritually attacking the salt tax and the colonial salt monopoly, he challenged Britain's right to rule over India. He went on foot and stayed overnight in villages, asking only for simple rural food. In this way he symbolized the perpetual moving around of the Hindu monk who embodied the higher values of the Hindu nation in the face of colonial oppression. While Gandhi undoubtedly preached a tolerant, pluralistic nationalism, his political style derived from the nationalist interpretation of Hindu discourses and practices. His use of a whole range of forms of protest, such as fasting and marching in what he did not call "political action," but "experiments with Truth," have become part of the modern political instrumentarium in India, used by any politician who wants to engage in extra-parliamentary action to press his issues.

Ayodhya and the Babari Masjid did not play significant roles in the Indian struggle for Independence. No doubt, like other places, Ayodhya was affected by the political turmoil, but it did not gain center stage in attempts to define Hindu-Muslim relations. Also, after Independence, when the Muslim presence in the area was much weakened by migration to Pakistan, the mosque-temple issue came up only briefly. After Independence, the mosque was protected by a police picket. Despite this precaution, Hindus entered the

mosque in the night of December 22, 1949 and converted it to a temple by installing an idol of Rama in it. The following morning large crowds assembled in front of the mosque and tried to force entry, led by the idea that Rama had appeared. The gate was locked and the police force strengthened. However, the District Magistrate, K.K.K. Nayar, refused to remove the idols. Nayar's position was supported by the Divisional Commissioner, who proposed to keep the site under police control, but allow a priest to do the necessary worship till the excitement would wear off and a plan could be made with leaders of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Something similar was indeed done. A committee of respectable Hindus of Ayodhya was allowed to enter the temple and worship the idol every year at December 22, while the site remained closed for the general public. In the meantime civil suits were filed by both Hindus and Muslims concerning the exclusive right to worship.

A forceful conversion of Babar's mosque into Rama's temple was successfully stopped by the police who closed the gate. Nevertheless, the idols were not removed nor Hindu worship completely stopped. This meant that the mosque had *de facto* been converted into a temple, since Hindu worship had replaced Muslim worship. On the higher levels of the administration there had been a strong feeling that the idols had to be moved, but District Magistrate Nayar, under whose responsibility the idols had been surreptitiously installed, had been totally uncooperative.³² Letting the courts decide implied a political strategy of pacification by infinite delay and indecision.

The very fact of Hindu worship in the mosque left the issue wide open for further action. However, it is striking that, after the frenzy of the post-Partition years, no further initiative was taken on the local level. This can be explained by the fear felt by local religious leaders that a temple on Rama's birthplace would provide strong competition with existing religious attractions in Ayodhya. The action had to come from outside and it did come in 1984, when the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Hindu Council began a campaign to liberate Rama's birthplace.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad is a Hindu nationalist movement, which was founded in Bombay in 1964. Its main objective is "to take steps to arouse consciousness, to consolidate and strengthen the Hindu Society." It organizes religious leaders of various Hindu communities in one overarching body which holds meetings at important Hindu festivals. In the 1960s and 1970s, the VHP focused on missionary work in tribal areas and on organizing Hindus overseas. Although it had not been unsuccessful in these activities, it was only in the eighties that it gained prominence on the Indian political scene. This was achieved by creative use of political ritual on a grand scale. In 1983, the VHP staged the *Ekatmatayajna*, a procession for national unity, which reached,

according to its own estimate, some 60 million people. In 1984 it started the *Ramjanmabhumi-muktiyajna*, a procession to liberate the birthplace of Lord Rama. This action aimed at the removal of the Babari Masjid and the building of a temple at this site.

The VHP's mass rituals effected at least two important things. They constructed a homogenized national Hindu identity by using a ritual repertoire, derived from various traditions, which excluded non-Hindus. To be a non-Hindu was to be an anti-national person, a demonic threat to the unity of Hindu India. Secondly, this Hindu identity was linked to a sense of sacred territory.

The first successful ritual of Hindu nationalism organized by the VHP, was the "Sacrifice for Unity" (*Ekatmatayajna*) in 1983. Three large processions (*yatra*) traversed India in November and December, 1983. One went from Hardwar to Kanyakumari, the second from Gangasagar to Somnath, and the third from Kathmandu (Nepal) to Rameshwaram, inaugurated by the king of Nepal, the world's only independent Hindu kingdom. At least 47 smaller processions (*upayatra*) of five days traversed other parts of the country and connected at appointed meeting-points with one of the three large processions. The routes taken by the processions were well-known pilgrimage routes connecting major religious centers and suggesting a geographical unity of India (*Bharatvarsha*) as a sacred area (*kshetra*) of Hindus. In this respect, pilgrimage was indeed quite consciously perceived and used as a ritual of national integration.

Processions of "temple-chariots" (*rathas*) are an important part of temple festivals in India. An image of the god is taken for a ride in his domain, confirming his territorial sovereignty and extending his blessings. The processions of the VHP made use of two "chariots," *rathas* in the modern form of brand-new trucks. The symbolism of the temple-chariot was perpetuated, but also the militant symbolism of the "war-chariot" of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. The story of the Bhagavad Gita, which was made into the fundamental text of Hinduism in the nineteenth century, emphasizes the duty of the warrior to fight when war is inevitable. In the pamphlets of the VHP, Arjuna's chariot is a recurring symbol. On one of the two chariots of the VHP, an image of Bharat Mata, Mother India, was carried.

The Mother Goddess is worshiped in many forms in India. Some of those are new. Santoshi Mata, "Satisfying Mother," for example, conquered India in the 1960s under the influence of a very successful movie. The political use of Mother symbolism is also widespread in India. In Andhra Pradesh, the regional party, Telugu Desam, has introduced a Telugu Mother Goddess and the late prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi tried to use the Goddess symbolism for her own glorification. The connection between the worship of the Mother Goddess and Mother India has been most forcefully laid in

Bengal where the worship of the Goddess is exceptionally strong. The Indian National Congress has chosen *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother), a poem by the Bengali nationalist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee as the national anthem despite its strong Hindu emphasis. The making of an image representing *Bharat Mata* is the VHP's reference to this nationalist tradition.

The other chariot carried an enormous water pot (*kalasha*) filled with water from the Ganges and a smaller water pot filled with local sacred water. This chariot was followed by a truck which sold Ganges water in small bottles. The Ganges is seen as a deity and her water contains the power to purify from sin and to grant salvation. All the sacred water in the rest of India is a secondary derivation of the Ganges. In this way, all rivers and temple-tanks are symbolically connected with the Ganges as the unifying symbol of Hindu India.

The waterpot (*kalasha*) is one of the most important objects in Hindu ritual. It symbolizes power and auspiciousness. The processions of the "Sacrifice for Unity" made a very effective use of an existing ritual repertoire on the Mother Goddess, the sacredness of Ganges water, and on Lord Ram and transformed this repertoire to communicate the message of Hindu unity. This could only be done by using a ritual repertoire which engages generally accepted Hindu conceptions without running into conflict with specific doctrines espoused by one of the many religious movements represented in the VHP. It is also perfectly clear that those who did not participate in this Hindu ritual could not be seen as part of the nation. In effect, the message was as much about Hindu unity as about the Muslim Other.

The processions gained an enormous publicity and enabled the VHP to start local branches in all parts of the country. It formed the basis for the VHP to subsequently organize a "sacrifice to liberate the birthplace of Lord Ram" (*Ramjanmabhumimuktiyajna*) in 1984.³³ A procession, starting in Sitamarhi (the birthplace of Sita, Ram's wife) reached Ayodhya on Saturday, October 6, 1984. The procession did not consist of much more than a few private cars with monks and a truck with the large statues of Ram and his wife, Sita under a banner with the slogan: *Bharat Mata ki Jay*, Hail to Mother India. On the next day, speeches were held in Ayodhya by VHP leaders and local abbots. All this was not very impressive. When the procession moved on to the state capital Lucknow, however, it gained considerably more attention. Later, the procession moved on from Lucknow to Delhi where the VHP intended to stage a huge rally, but it was caught in the aftermath of the murder of Mrs Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards which had turned national attention away from the Ayodhya issue. Nevertheless, in the following years, the VHP continued to put pressure on politicians, which resulted in a decision of the

District and Session Judge of Faizabad on February 14, 1986 that the disputed site should be opened immediately to the public.

The VHP continued to agitate for the demolition of the mosque and the building of a temple. From September 1989, the VHP engaged in the consecration of "bricks of Lord Ram" (*ramshila*) in villages in North India and the organization of processions to bring these sacred bricks to Ayodhya for building a temple on Ram's birthplace in place of the mosque of Babar on November 9. Riots connected to these processions broke out in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They were most serious in Bhagalpur, Bihar, where hundreds of Muslims were killed in October 1989. In the midst of this, the Government of India announced parliamentary elections to be held in November. As a reaction to that announcement, the VHP decided to call off its plan for a march on Ayodhya, but to continue with their foundation plans. Ultimately, the VHP was allowed to lay its foundation stones in a pit outside the mosque on so-called undisputed lands. It is remarkable that some of the stones prominently exhibited came from the US, Canada, the Caribbean, South Africa, as if to emphasize the transnational character of this nationalist enterprise.

The BJP gained considerably in the national elections of November 1989, taking its strength in Parliament from two seats to 86. While remaining outside the National Front government of former opposition parties, its parliamentary support was indispensable for the central government's survival. Since the BJP's electoral gain was clearly related to its direct support of the VHP's Ayodhya program, the temple-mosque controversy was kept alive as one of the most important political issues. Especially in the second part of 1990 there were two major political developments which affected the course of action regarding Ayodhya. In the first place, the Kashmir issue flared up with an unprecedented flow of Hindu refugees trying to leave that part of the country. The BJP took a strong anti-Pakistan stance here and this is always related in India to an anti-Muslim stance.

Secondly, in September, V.P. Singh's government decided to implement an earlier report of the so-called Mandal Commission which proposed a considerable increase of reservations for the Backward Classes in educational institutions and government service. This resulted in wide-spread anti-reservation riots in which a large number of students immolated themselves in a new form of protest for India. Since the agitation around reservation imperiled the Hindu agenda of the VHP/BJP, L. K. Advani, the leader of the BJP, decided to start a procession from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya, another *rath yatra*, through ten states, with its declared goal the construction of the temple on October 30, 1990.³⁴ This initiative met with great enthusiasm all over the country. Members of the Youth Branch of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, offered

a cup of their blood to their leader to show their determination. All this set a kind of time bomb which ticked with every mile taken in the direction of Ayodhya. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), in which state Ayodhya is located, took a vow that he would not allow Advani to enter Ayodhya. However, before he reached UP, on October 30, Advani was arrested on the orders of Laloo Prasad Yadav, the chief minister of neighboring Bihar. This did not prevent Advani's followers from marching to the mosque, but they were stopped by police firing. To appreciate the firm stance taken by Mulayam Singh Yadav and his caste-fellow Laloo Prasad Yadav, backed by V.P. Singh's central government, one has to take into account that they are leaders of an upwardly mobile backward caste which would benefit considerably from the implementation of the Mandal Report. Partly for this reason, the action by the government resulted in its loss of the BJP's support in Parliament and its subsequent fall on November 16, 1990.

The VHP continued its agitation with a highly effective video and audio cassette campaign on the happenings in Ayodhya on October 30, 1990. It claimed that thousands were killed by the police and that the evidence was suppressed. Martyrs (*amar kar sewaks*) were cremated and their bones and ashes taken in ritual pots (*asthi-kalashas*) through the country before immersion in sacred water. In Ayodhya, sacrificial rituals and marches to the Babari Masjid continued to be staged intermittently.

In May and June 1991, new national elections were held, in which 511 seats were contested. The BJP won 119 seats and 20 percent of the votes. This meant that it had nearly doubled its share of national votes and that it emerged as, by far, India's largest opposition party.³⁵ Perhaps even more significantly, it won the state elections of UP, India's most populous state of more than 100 million people, in which Ayodhya is located. This success, however, placed the BJP in the difficult position of having to placate the VHP, which continued to press for the demolition of the mosque, while trying to prevent the Congress (I) from finding any legitimation for replacing the BJP government of UP with Governor's rule.

A deliberate attempt to place the Ayodhya issue on the backburner was made, again by starting a procession. An *Ekta Yatra*, (Procession for Unity), was performed by Murlī Manohar Joshi, the president of the BJP, starting in Kanyakumari, India's southernmost tip on December 11, 1991, destined to reach Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir in the North, on January 26, 1992. The difference between the 1983 *Ekatmata Yajna* and the 1991–2 *Ekta Yatra* was a shift from a focus on religious ritual, symbolizing Hindu unity, to a more unembellished secular ritual, symbolizing the unity of India as a nation-state. It was the BJP's aim to draw attention away from the Ayodhya issue to the Kashmir issue and Joshi's ultimate ritual action was a specifi-

cally nationalist one, the unfurling of the Indian flag in Srinagar. In an interesting way, this ritual act was made possible only by support from the Congress (I) Union government, which ordered the Indian military in Kashmir to protect Joshi and his comrades from assaults by Kashmiri Independence fighters.

The failure of the *Ekta Yatra* has been one of the factors leading the BJP to focus its attention again on the Ayodhya issue. Another element has been that the VHP did not allow the BJP to sidetrack it after its electoral gain. In the course of 1992 the Congress (I) government continued its attempts to resolve the issue by organizing direct negotiations between the VHP and the Muslim Babari Masjid Action Committee, but these negotiations proved fruitless. Then, on December 6, 1992, a rally in Ayodhya, organized by the VHP and the BJP, resulted in an attack on the mosque and its subsequent demolition. Although BJP leader Lal Kishan Advani, who was present at this occasion, immediately tried to distance himself from the act of demolition, there can be little doubt that the entire event had been well planned in advance. At the same time there can be no doubt that the paramilitary forces, present at the site, could have prevented the demolition. However, Congress (I) stood to gain from this illegal act of its political opponents, since it provided the legitimation for dismissing the BJP governments of the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. Very serious riots broke out in several parts of the country, notably in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Surat and Calcutta. More than a thousand people, mostly Muslims, were killed in Bombay alone. Muslim gang leaders retaliated months later with bomb attacks on several official buildings in Bombay. All this has caused an enduring crisis in Hindu-Muslim relations, but also a decline of Muslim confidence in the Indian secular state's capacity to protect minorities. For the BJP the demolition of the mosque has caused a considerable set-back in Uttar Pradesh, but, on the whole the party has continued to be strong in other parts of the country, notably in Maharashtra and Gujarat, two of the more industrialized states in Western India.

CONCLUSION

We have discussed three instances of religious conflict in Ayodhya. The first written record we have of such a conflict concerns a battle between two groups of Hindu monks. This conflict concerned the control over sacred space as well as over networks of pilgrimage and long distance trading. Its violence was religious in the sense that the results of it showed not only the physical strength (*bal*) of one party as compared to the other, but also the

superiority of its ascetic discipline (*sadhana*). There was no sense of gaining leadership over the Hindu population in order to overthrow Muslim rule. Rather there was a competition to gain the patronage of Muslim rulers. There was also, surely, no sense of territory in the modern sense. These monks probably operated with a kind of sacred geography which connected the main religious centers through their annual cycle of pilgrimage.

The second recorded conflict did show some concerns of a communal nature. The conflict was about sacred space, a Muslim mosque, allegedly in the principal Ramanandi temple. In a superficial reading, it almost looks like the current situation in reverse. A major difference, however, is that the conflict showed the fragmented nature of Muslim identity, just as the first incident showed the fragmented nature of Hindu identity. This conflict concerned, more than anything else, a lower-middle-class Sunni challenge to the religious authority of the Shi'a Nawabs to define correct Islamic politics towards Hindu idolaters. The violent confrontation which ultimately ensued was not between Hindus and Muslims, but between Sunni 'holy warriors' and a Shi'a army. That it came to such a confrontation had to do with the erosion of Nawabi authority by the already formidable British presence in Awadh. The notion of space operative in this context was one in which the ruler governs an – in principle – unbounded, universal realm in the name of Islam. The relation with non-Muslims in such a realm is a challenge which would, ultimately, be solved by conversion. (In Islamic discourse, non-Muslims are comparable to permanent 'guests' who have to be protected by Muslim rulers).³⁶ It was the status of Hindus and their religious practices in a realm governed by Muslims that was at issue in the debate between Shi'as and Sunnis which turned violent. In the end, this was a debate about the power to define orthodoxy. It should be clear that we are far removed from the politics of representation here, in which the political will of the majority counts, not the orthodoxy of the 'true believers'.

To understand the current mosque–temple issue one has to take the discourse of modern nationalism into account. Although the VHP consists largely of Hindu monks, they do not discuss doctrinal orthodoxy. Rather it is the opinion of the majority of the people which they seek to express. This homogenized opinion is created by mass ritual which is a combination of heterogeneous elements. Again, there is a notion of space involved here, but it is the modern one of territorial nationalism articulated with the sacred geography of Hindu pilgrimage. The movement "to liberate Rama's birthplace" implies a "nationalization" of Rama devotion. It shows the linkage between the ritual discourse of Rama devotion and the discourse of Hindu nationalism.

As we have seen, Rama is an incarnation of the god Vishnu and, at the same time, he is the king of Ayodhya who rules according to the Religious

Law (*dharma*). He is therefore a god-king. This discourse lends itself, of course, for appropriation in Hindu kingdoms of the pre-Independence period. For dynasties such as that of the Bhumihar Rajas of Banaras, investment in the pageantry of the Ram Lila was an important aspect of their legitimacy. Much of this, however, collapses in the 1920s and 1930s. The role of patrons of religion was taken over by business groups, such as the Marwaris. Both ex-aristocrats and Marwaris have come to play a significant role in supporting the nationalization of Rama devotion.

The notion that the kingdom of Rama provided one with an ideal model for the nation-state was taken to some extreme length in a marginal Hindu party, the Rama Rajya Parishad, founded by Swami Karpatri (1907–82). In a 1952 party manifesto, Rama's glorious reign is invoked: "Every citizen of Ramraj was contented, happy, gifted with learning, and religious-minded ... All were truthful. None was close-fisted, none was rude; none lacked prudence; and above all, none was atheist. All followed the path of dharma."³⁷ While Karpatri did not have much success with his adventure, it is important to note that the notion of Ramraj was also important in the political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. In Gandhi's view, based on his reading of Tulsi Das, Ramraj was "not only the political Home Rule but also dharmaraj ... which was something higher than ordinary political emancipation."³⁸

It is indeed fairly typical for Hindu nationalism that it allows for a wide divergence of political interpretations of religious concepts. There is a vast gap between Karpatri and Gandhi, but still they are operating within the same discourse which cannot be very appealing to those who are outside the Hindu fold. It is the particular strength of the VHP that it articulates aspects of the state-religion rhetoric of Karpatri and Gandhi at a conjuncture in which the "secular multiculturalism" of Nehru's Congress appears to be failing.

Finally, what do these three incidents show us in general about the relation between riots and rituals? While there can be little doubt that, firstly, ritual performance plays an important role in the construction of religious identity (and difference) and, secondly, that we are dealing with riots between groups with a religious identity here, it is more difficult to demonstrate a direct causal relation between rituals and violence outside those rituals. Pilgrimage to Ayodhya and participation in the worship of Rama have taken place for centuries without leading directly to the large scale riots we have seen in the last few years. Besides, riots between Hindus and Muslims have taken place for centuries without any relation to Rama devotion. A straightforward approach would be to say that riots have all kinds of contextual explanations and that in some cases they are discursively linked to the performance of ritual. However, it is hardly feasible to make sharp distinctions between events

and their interpretations, between practices and their discursive context. Indeed, the interpretation is part of the event.

The discourse of modernity, introduced in Indian society in the nineteenth century, has changed considerably the discursive context in which religious violence is interpreted. While in the first two instances of religious violence we have discussed there would not have been any notion of a distinction between religion and politics, such a distinction dominates the discursive context of the current violence. This distinction belongs to a discourse of secularization, developed in the European Enlightenment, which assigns religious faith to the private domain as a matter of personal beliefs without political consequences. The political aspect of religion is often seen as a transgression of what religion is supposed to be.³⁹ A widespread idea is that religious people should not fight each other, but live in harmony. When confronted with violent conflict between religious communities, outsiders often deplore the “politicization” of religion. A version of this view is the argument that violence between religious communities has nothing to do with religion, since it is *really* economical and political competition which fuels it. This discourse which makes a sharp dichotomy between *real* religion and “politicized” religion can be located, by-and-large, among the well-meaning, well-educated, “responsible” individuals in society as well as among social scientists. Those who perpetrate the violence are often characterized as “fanatic” members of mobs led astray by their “irresponsible” leaders. It is this discourse which obfuscates the important connections between riots and rituals in the modern world.

NOTES

- 1 For rituals, see J.F. Staal, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual”, *Numen*, XXVI (1970), 2–22. The description of the “insane” violence of “senseless” mobs is very common in newspaper descriptions and in the discourse of the state. Riots are seen as spontaneous explosions of pent-up feelings. This interpretation emphasizes their irrationality and lack of purpose. It becomes the acting out of “narcissistic needs” in psychoanalytic discourse; see Sudhir Kakar, “Some Unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India”, in Veena Das (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 135–45.
- 2 See Das, *Mirrors of Violence*, 1–36.
- 3 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).
- 4 Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

- 5 Marc Gaborieau, "From Al-Beruni to Jinnah: Idiom, ritual and ideology of the Hindu-Muslim confrontation in South Asia," *Anthropology Today*, 1, No. 3, (1985), 7-14.
- 6 Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions," in Manning Nash (ed.), *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).
- 7 Eric Wolf, "The Virgin of Guadeloupe: A Mexican National Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore*, LXXI, No.1 (1958), 38.
- 8 M. N. Srinivas, "The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization," in Philip Mason (ed.), *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 74.
- 9 David Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972), p. 401.
- 10 Chris Fuller, *Servants of the Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- 11 Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*.
- 12 Maurice Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 13 Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).
- 14 C. A. Bayly, "The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860," *Modern Asian Studies*, XIX, No. 2 (1985), 177-203.
- 15 Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 16 See Peter van der Veer, "Hindu 'Nationalism' and the discourse of 'Modernity': the Vishva Hindu Parishad," in Martin Marty and Scott Appleby (eds) *Accounting for Fundamentalisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 17 Some of my arguments in this section can be found in greater detail in my recent book, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- 18 Talal Asad, "Anthropological conceptions of Religion," *Man (NS)*, XVIII (1983), 237-59.
- 19 I use the term "monk" to refer to *sadhus* who live apart from the world under religious vows and according to a rule.
- 20 Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth* (London: Athlone [LSE Monographs 59], 1988).
- 21 See Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth*.
- 22 G.D. Bhatnagar does not even mention the Babari Mosque in his account, but calls it the Jama' Masjid, in *Awadh under Wajid 'ali Shah* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1968).
- 23 This may look like 'syncretism', but the shared worship of a slab of stone may not mean a shared understanding of what that worship means. I would suggest that the place in question is contested terrain and that, at some point, Ramanandi militant ascetics were able to get it under their control.
- 24 See Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 245. My account of these events is based on Bhatnagar, *Awadh*, and on Cole's careful description.

- 25 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 333.
- 26 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 172.
- 27 V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Poona: S.R., 1942; originally published in 1922), p. 1.
- 28 AnandYang, "Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the 'Anti-Cow Killing' Riot of 1893," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXII, No. 4 (1980), 576–96.
- 29 Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*.
- 30 Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
- 31 Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 277–81.
- 32 Nayar was forced to resign over this case, but his attitude made him a local hero; see Harold A. Gould, "Religion and Politics in a UP Constituency," in Donald E. Smith (ed.), *South Asian Politics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 51–74. His portrait was enshrined in a pavillion, built by the VHP on the grounds of the mosque, to show the pictorial history of the Hindu struggle for Rama's birthplace.
- 33 This part is based partly on Peter Van der Veer, "God Must be Liberated," *Modern Asian Studies*, XXI, No.2 (1987), 283–301.
- 34 Somnath was chosen as a starting-point for this procession since the VHP/BJP regards it as a precedent for the Mosque/Temple dispute in Ayodhya. The Somnath temple was destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1024 and rebuilt by Hindu nationalists, including Congress ministers, such as Vallabhbbhai Patel and K.M. Munshi, in 1950–1. The then President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, performed the installation ceremony on May 11, 1951. The VHP/BJP argument is that, when the state could support the rebuilding of the Somnath temple even in the "secular" Nehru years, it should certainly be supportive of the rebuilding of Rama's temple in Ayodhya (see about this issue, my "Ayodhya and Somnath: Eternal Shrines, Contested Histories," *Social Research*, LIX, No. 1 (Spring 1992), 85–109.
- 35 The Congress (I) party which suffered in May the loss of its leader, Rajiv Gandhi, who was murdered by Sri Lankan Tamil extremists, won 225 seats and 37 percent of the votes which allowed it to form the government.
- 36 Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 41.
- 37 Quoted in Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 385.
- 38 Quoted in Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, p. 380.
- 39 My analysis here has been informed by Talal Asad's introduction to "Religion and Politics," a special number of *Social Research*, LIX, No. 1 (1992), 3–17.