

The Time of Kali: Violence between Religious Groups in India

Sudhir Kakar

Abstract

The author focuses on the theme of violence between Hindus and Muslims in India in great depth and detail. He conducts an analysis of the phenomena by integrating various points of view: religious, historical, social, economic and psychological. He closely examines the psychological reasons that are the base of the conflicting relationships between the two different religious groups and does so from a psychoanalytical angle. He lays out the projective and fantasmatic processes that define the image of the other as being an enemy when the formation of an identity that is based on radical communityism is formed in both groups. This then prevails over any social plan.

Key words: religious violence, identity, communalism, colonialism, basic trust, psychology of the masses.

On the afternoon of 11th December, 1990, Sardar, a Muslim auto-rickshaw driver, was stabbed outside a coal depot in the old part of the city of Hyderabad in the south of India. The assailants were two Hindu youths. Muslims retaliated by stabbing four Hindus in different parts of the old, walled city. The violence that followed was to last for ten weeks, claim more than three hundred lives and leave thousands wounded. When I began the study of this “riot”—as violent altercations between Hindus and Muslims are usually called—in the following year, interviewing not only the survivors but also agents of this violence, I was struck by the consensus within and between the communities on the events preceding the riot. The murder of Sardar was the trigger for the violence, while the gun was the rising tension between Hindus and Muslims in the country since the beginning of October when L.K. Advani, the present Home Minister of India and then the President of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) began a *rath yatra* from the temple of Somnath on the west coast to Ayodhya in the Hindi heartland of the north. The stated purpose of the *yatra*, which was to take Advani through a large part of the country in thirty days and over ten thousand kilometers, was to mobilize support for the construction of the Rama temple at the legendary birth site of the god where stood an unused mosque constructed in the sixteenth century in honor of the founder of the Mughal dynasty. The *yatra* aroused intense fervor among the Hindus. Crowds thronged the roads all over the country, showering flower petals on the cavalcade as it passed through their villages and towns. In a more somber aftermath, there was violence between Hindus and Muslims in many places in wake of the *rath yatra*.

Advani's cavalcade came to a halt when he was arrested on 23 October in Bihar before he could start on the last lap of his journey to Ayodhya where the BJP had promised to start the construction of the temple on 9 November. On that day, scores were killed when the police opened fire on volunteers intent on the demolition of the Babri mosque as a prelude to building the temple. Soon, Hindu-Muslim riots erupted in many parts of the country.

The Context of Religious Violence

The consensus on the immediate events leading to the 1990 violence in Hyderabad disappears when we come to the more distal causes. The wider context of the Hindu-Muslim violence shows large variations within and across social science disciplines. It is as if different parts of the background in a large canvas that foregrounds dead bodies lying in the alleys and burnt houses in Hyderabad in December 1990 has been painted in a variety of distinct styles by painters belonging to different schools, their palettes sometimes complementary and at others clashing.

In the school which accords primacy to the *economic* factor, the conflict between the two communities that leads to violent clashes is believed to have less to do with religion than with 'communalism'. Communalism is a specifically Indian concept which signifies a strong identification with a community of believers which has not only has religious affiliation but also social, political and especially economic interests in common which conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers—the enemy-- sharing the same geographic space. In the economic vision, the 'real' cause of violence generally embraces some version of a class struggle between the poor and the rich. This, it is claimed, is as true of the anti-Semitic pogroms in Spain in the fourteenth century (Wolff, 1971), of sixteenth-century Catholic-Protestant violence in France (Estebe, 1968; Davis, 1987), of anti-Catholic riots in nineteenth-century London (Rude, 1964), as of contemporary Hindu-Muslim riots in India (Engineer, 1984; Arslam, Rajan, 1994). In the more contemporary formulation of rational-choice theory, the conflict between groups is a consequence of competition for resources, with individuals believing that they can benefit if their group gains at the expense of the other group (Hardin, 1995).

Another school emphasizes the wider *political* context of such conflicts, especially the ending of the colonial rule (Horowitz, 1985). If Hindu-Muslim relations were better in the past, with much less overt violence, it was also the kind of polity in which two the two peoples lived. This polity was that of the empire, the Mughal empire followed by the British one. An empire, the political scientist Michael Walzer (1982) observes, is characterized by a mixture of repression for any strivings for independence, tolerance for different cultures, religions and ways of life and insistence that things remain peaceful. It is only with the end of the empire that the political questions—'Who *among us* shall have power here, in these villages, these towns?', 'Which group will dominate, what will be the new ranking order?'—that

leads to a heightened awareness of religious-cultural differences, and establishing the potential for violent conflict. The rise of fundamentalist groups and the politicization of religious differences in many parts of the world at the end of colonialism has been amply documented (Marty, Appleby, 1991, 1993). In one branch of the political school, emphasizing more local than international relations, riots between Hindus and Muslims occur in towns and cities where formal professional and trade associations which include members of both communities are weak or non-existent (Varshney, Wilkinson, 1996).

Enter, the historians. If one looks at the *historical* context, then Hindus and Muslims are relatively recent categories in Indian history, one school of history avers (Thapar, Mukhia, Chandra, 1969). In pre-colonial and early colonial times, there was a commingling and flowering of a composite cultural tradition and the development of a syncretic popular religion. The large-scale violence between the two communities, which began to spread in the late nineteenth century was chiefly because of colonialism, namely the British policy of deliberately strengthening Muslim communal identity because of the threat of Indian nationalism (Pandey, 1990).

The other school, disparagingly called 'Hindu nationalist' by the former, 'secular' set of historians, sees Hindu-Muslim relations framed by the fundamental divide of a thousand-year old 'civilizational' conflict in which the Muslims, militarily victorious and politically ascendant for centuries, tried to impose Islam on their Hindu subjects through all means, from coercion to bribery and cajolery, and yet had only limited success (e.g. Majumdar, 1970). The vast majority of Hindus kept their civilizational core intact while they resentfully tolerated the Muslim onslaught. The rage of the denigrated Hindu, stored up over long periods of time, had to explode once historical circumstances sanctioned such eruptions.

In painting the contextual background of the Hyderabad violence, the *social-psychological* school would stress the identity threat that is being posed by the forces of modernization and globalization to peoples in many parts of the world. There are feelings of loss and helplessness accompanying dislocations and migrations from rural areas to the shanty towns of urban megalopolises, the disappearance of craft skills that underlay traditional work identities, and the humiliation caused by the homogenizing and hegemonizing impact of the modern world, which pronounces ancestral cultural ideals and values outmoded and irrelevant. These changes heighten the group aspects of identity as the affected (and afflicted) look to cultural-religious groups to combat their feelings of helplessness and loss and to serve as vehicles for the redress of injuries to self-esteem (e.g. Kakar, 1996).

The vision of the *psychoanalytic* school is derived from its conception of the origins of human development. Because of early difficulties in integrating contradictory representations of the self and the parents—the 'good' loving child and the 'bad' raging one; the benevolent, care-taking parent and the hateful, frustrating one—the child must disown the anxiety provoking bad representations through projection. First projected to inanimate objects and animals and later to people and other groups—the

latter often available to a child as a pre-selection by the group—the disavowed bad representations *need* such ‘reservoirs as Vamik Volkan (1990) calls them. Hindus and Muslims need each other as enemies. They are each other’s necessary reservoirs, repositories for hateful feelings for which no clear-cut addressee is available.

Not all the schools are based on complex and sophisticated visions of causes that lead to violence between religious groups. We also have the rough and ready brush strokes of the *demographic* perspective which says that urban areas and within them only those with a Muslim minority population ranging between 20 and 40 percent of the total population, have always been riot prone (Engineer, 1984; Saxena, 1984; Krishna, 1985); Hyderabad, of course, fulfills both conditions. Presumably, with a population share of under 20 percent, a minority is much too scared to retaliate to what it may perceive as a provocation and the violence, if it occurs at all, will have the nature of a pogrom rather than a riot.

As a psychoanalyst, I can then only note that violence between Hindus and Muslims is a complex demographic, political, economic, historical, social and psychological phenomenon before I turn to the corner of the canvas my school can call distinctly, if not uniquely, its own—the delineation of the subjective experience of men, women and children—both Hindu and Muslim—in one particular location, the old, walled part of the city of Hyderabad and at one particular time when the tension between the two communities progressed from the activation of a dormant conflict to the murderous violence of a full-fledged riot. Like a clinical case study, this reconstruction of internal states of the subjects suffers from the shortcoming that the accounts are retrospective, collected in interviews eight months after the events. There is thus an inevitable repression of some memories and the embellishment of certain others, both designed to accomplish particular pragmatic actions such as a demonstration of the moral superiority of one’s own group but also its status as a victim.

Hindu—Muslim Violence in Hyderabad

The conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad was dormant in the sense that the last riot had taken place in 1984. Before that, since 1978, there was at least a riot a year, sometimes more, the number of lives lost in six years estimated at over four hundred. Each of the schools is well represented in the explanation of the conflict. As a Muslim ruled state by a Nizam under the sufferance of first the Mughal and then the British empires, Hyderabad was integrated into an independent India in 1951 when the political question of new patterns of dominance was reopened. Demographically, the minority population in the old city—in this case Hindu—increased from 21 to 40 percent in the 1970’s till the endemic violence reversed the trend, the Hindu population being around 30 percent in 1990. Economically, with the dismantling of the Nizam’s administrative machinery, the disappearance of the feudal economic base on which most of the old city had subsisted and the migration of many

of the wealthier Muslims to Pakistan after Hyderabad became a part of India, the economic competition between the two communities for the few economic opportunities, such as the control of the vegetable trade, became fierce.

Historically (in the 'nationalist' version), although the Hindus were always a part of what was essentially a Muslim city, their native Telegu culture was clearly a subordinate, 'low' culture in the dominant Perso-Islamic scheme of things. The dark skinned Hindu peasantry was assigned a humble place in the cultural pecking order where fair-skinned Persian migrants were right at the top, followed by Turks, other central Asian immigrants and the native-born Indian Muslims. Although talented high caste Hindus like the Brahmins and the Kayasthas could rise to high positions in the court and the coexistence between Hindus and Muslims was easier in an earlier era (a nod to the 'secular' school), the current popular Hindu version—much more uncontested than the variable, academic versions of the past that are always subject to different interpretations (Lowenthal, 1989)—of the historical conflict goes like this:

“The clashes between Hindus and Muslims started long ago in the period of the Nizam and his *razakars* (a marauding, unofficial army) who were very cruel to the Hindus. They used to harass our girls, rape them. This happened not only in villages but even in Hyderabad. We feared the Muslims. The rule was theirs, the king was theirs, the police was theirs, so it was hard for the Hindus to resist. We were also poor and no one supports the poor. Some *marwadis* may have been well-off but the majority of Hindus was poor. The Muslims were close to the king. They were moneylenders, charging high rates of interest. Thus they were rich and the Hindus poor and though we lived together Muslims dominated the Hindus.” (Kakar, 1996)

It is instructive to note that in popular accounts of the conflict, the economic, secular and nationalist historical explanations are not exclusive but blended into a single narrative. Unlike the historians, the people involved in the conflict operate with two histories of Hindu-Muslim relations. In times of heightened conflict between the two communities, the Hindu nationalist history that supports the version of age-old animosity between the two assumes preeminence and organizes cultural memory in one particular direction. In times of relative peace, the focus shifts back to the secular history emphasizing commonalities and shared pieces of the past. Many of the cultural memories that were appropriate during the conflict will retreat, fade, or take on new meaning, while others that incorporate the peaceful coexistence of Hindus and Muslims will resurface.

The social-psychological context of the conflict was especially evident in case of Muslims who were more prone to view themselves as helpless victims of changed historical circumstances and the demands of the modern world. They conveyed an impression of following a purposeless course, buffeted by the impact of others in a kind of social Brownian motion. Some Muslim women even took a melancholy satisfaction from this turn of the historical wheel which had reversed the position of subjects and rulers and of the accustomed directions of inequality and injustice. The loss of a collective self-idealization was especially evident in case of the elite among

the Muslims which explicitly mourned the loss of Muslim power and glory in the abrupt ending of the Nizam's rule. For this elite, with a fractured self-esteem in the wake of historical change that saw an end to their political role and a virtual disappearance of their language, as also in case of poor Muslims with an inchoate sense of oppression and the looming shadow of a menacing, hopeless future, there were enough fundamentalist preachers offering a cure. The bad condition of the Muslims is not due to historical changes but because of a glaring internal fault: the weakening or loss of religious faith. "No wonder", says one Mullah, "that Islam is bending under the assault of *kufra*(unbelief); Arabs are bowing before Jews and Christians, you before the Hindus. What is this preoccupation with worldly wealth and success? Allah says, I did not bring you into the world to make two shops out of one, four out of two, two factories out of one, four out of two. Does the Qur'an want you to do that? Does the Prophet? No! They want you to dedicate yourself to the faith, give your life for the glory of Islam." (Kakar, 1996).

Communal Identities

Besides organizing memories of Hindu-Muslim relations according to the conflict version of history, the activation of the dormant conflict also had the consequence of bringing an individual's communal identity—'communal' in the Indian sense, with antagonism towards a rival religious group as its defining feature-- to the fore. Whereas an individual's religious group identity, manifesting itself in congregational activities such as prayer or ritual, creates feelings of attunement and resonance with other believers, communal identity is charged with an ambience of aggression and persecution. Religious identity, constituted through an *awareness* of belonging to a community of believers is replaced by the communal identity's *assertion* of this affiliation; the "We-ness" of the religious group identity gives way to the "We *are*" of the communal identity. The self-assertion of "We are", with its potential for confrontation with the "We are" of the other religious group, is inherently a carrier of aggression, together with the consequent fears of retaliation and persecution and is thus always attended by a sense of risk and potential for violence.

The distinction between religious and communal group identities can also be seen in a noteworthy difference between the Hindus and Muslims. A Hindu's self-identification occurs only when he talks of *the* Muslim; otherwise the conversation is in terms of castes. The Muslim's awareness of his religious group identity, as a member of a community of believers, does not need the presence of a Hindu (Kakar, 1996), a finding which is also true of other parts of India (Ghosh, Kumar, Tripathi, 1992). On the other hand, there is no difference between Hindus and Muslims in the pervasiveness and strength of their communal identities.

As Hindus and Muslims began to see each other as stereotypes, perceiving each other in terms of shared category characteristics rather than their personal, idiosyncratic natures, an inevitable homogenization and depersonalization

followed. Conversations couched in terms of group categories, “Look at what the Hindus are doing!”, “The Muslims have crossed all limits!”, increased markedly. The rhetoric of violence became frequent though it still remained a substitute for action.

The conscious experiencing and expression of identity through the religious group rather than through other group identities such as those of family, caste or profession, varies with individuals. At the one extreme there are always some Hindus and Muslims, whose personal identity is not overwhelmed by their communal identity even in the worst phases of a violent conflict. These are persons who wear their group identity lightly and are capable of acts of compassion and self-sacrifice, such as saving members of the ‘enemy’ group from the fury of a rampaging mob even at considerable danger to their own physical safety. On the other extreme there are others—the fanatics—whose behavior, even in times of peace is dictated by their communal identity, an armor that is rarely taken off.

In both communities, communal identities also tended to be less salient for women than men, a difference that seems to be rooted in their developmental histories. There was a significant gender difference between boys and girls from the ages of ten and fifteen when they were given the task of constructing an ‘exciting’ scene using toys and dolls easily identifiable as Hindu or Muslim (Kakar, 1996, 146-151). Scenes of violence between the two communities were relatively absent in the girls’ constructions whereas they dominated those of the boys. Even when they identified the dolls as Hindu or Muslim, girls tended to construct peaceful scenes from family life, with the excitement—such as a policeman chasing a robber—banished to the periphery.

The Role of Religious-Political Demagogues

The activation of a perennial Hindu-Muslim conflict version of history and a movement of communal identities to the forefront of consciousness still need powerful additional impulses before the outbreak of violence becomes possible. The zone of indifference with regards to one’s faith and religious community in which everyday life is lived, unfettered and unworried by excessive and obsessive scrutiny, may be breached by momentous external events such as the demolition of the Babri mosque but the breach needs considerable widening before violence comes pouring out. It is here that religious demagogues, owing allegiance to fundamentalist political formations, enter the scene, stoking persecution anxiety with images of a besieged and endangered community on the verge of extinction at the hands of the other, enemy group.

“In Kashmir, the Hindu was a minority and was hounded out of the valley,” the Hindu demagogue thunders. “Slogans of ‘Long live Pakistan’ were carved with red hot iron rods on the thighs of our Hindu daughters. Try to feel the unhappiness and pain of the Hindu who became a refugee in his own country. The Hindu was dishonored in Kashmir because he was in a minority. But there is a conspiracy to

make him a minority in the whole country. The state tells us Hindus to have only two or three children. After a while, they will say do not have even one. But what about those who have six wives, have thirty or thirty-five children and breed like mosquitoes and flies?...

I submit to you that when the Hindu of Kashmir became a minority he came to Jammu. From Jammu he came to Delhi. But if you Hindus are on the run all over India, where will you go? Drown in the Indian ocean or jump from the peak of the Himalayas?"(Kakar, 1996,208).

"Awake O Indian Muslims before you disappear completely. Even your story will not find mention in other stories," the Muslim demagogue retorts (Kakar, 1996).

Here, the demagogue can count on memories of previous Hindu-Muslim riots all over the country which have almost always had their origin in the fear of one community being exterminated or seriously damaged by the other. The demolition of the Babri mosque played into a long standing fear of Indian Muslims of being swamped by a preponderant and numerous Hindu host, a chain of associations leading from the razing of an unused mosque to the disappearance of Islam in India. The 1969 riot in Ahmedabad was preceded by a period of tension when the RSS (Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh) began a campaign demanding the "Indianization" of Muslims and thus initiating a similar chain of mental associations. For the Hindus, the Muslim threat is to very survival of their homeland which is imperiled either through the Muslim's demonstrative identification with pan-Islamic causes or in the demand for a separate cultural identity, expressed through the insistence on maintaining Islamic personal law or in demanding a greater role for Urdu. Here the threat to the Hindus travels through an associative chain where such Muslim actions are viewed as precursors to violent Muslim separatism (as in Kashmir), the creation of another Pakistan and, ultimately, the dreaded revival of medieval Muslim rule.

As in individuals, where persecution anxiety often manifests itself in threats to the integrity of the body, especially during psychotic episodes, the speech of the demagogues is rich in metaphors of the "community-body" under concrete, physical assault. The imagery of the Hindu or Muslim body amputated, raped, slashed, harnesses the power of unconscious fantasy to amplify the threat of persecution, anchoring the dubious *logos* of a particular political argument deeply in imagination through the power of *mythos*.

The Appearance of Kali

One knows that the time of Kali is at hand from the content of rumors that now begin to circulate in the two communities. The rumors, with slight variations, are curiously unchanging from one riot to the other. As a Hindu, I remember having heard the same rumors as a child in the north Indian city of Rohtak during the riots that followed the partition of the sub-continent into the states of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Ahmedabad riot of 1969, and then in my interviews on the Hyderabad riot in 1990.

Large stocks of weapons, acid and other materials needed for manufacturing bombs stored in the underground cellar of mosques, armed Pakistani agents seen parachuting into the city at night are two such perennial rumors. But the more insidious ones, heightening persecution anxiety and further helping to release our paranoid potential have to do with dangers to the body that come from substances normally considered benevolent: Muslims (or Hindus) having bribed milk vendors to poison the milk, Muslims (or Hindus) breaking into grocery shops and mixing powdered glass with the salt. It may well be that from an evolutionary perspective, rumors constitute a sharing of information about danger which was adaptive for a group's survival (Zillmann, 1998), but they are also vital in the establishment of communal identity in individuals. It is not only the feelings of dread and danger but also of exhilaration at the transcendence of individual boundaries, the feelings of closeness and belonging to an entity beyond one's self, that cements this identity. Both a cause and consequence of the foregrounding of such an identity, rumors are one of the midwives for the birth of Kali when individuals begin to feel helpless and frightened (but also manically exhilarated), loosened from their traditional cognitive moorings and thus prepared to give up previously held social, economic or political explanations for communal conflict. The strong anxiety accompanying the birth of Kali can take many people away from 'knowing' back to the realm of 'unknowing'—from a 'knowledge' of the cause of their distress to a state where they do not know what it is that makes them anxious though they *do* know they are in distress. One antidote to paralyzing anxiety is anger, preferably in a violent assertion that is psychically mobilizing (Likierman, 1987), a violence almost invariably viewed by its perpetrators as preempting the enemy's imminent attack.

Here, "the time of Kali" is not merely a literary conceit but a descriptive metaphor for the internal states of those caught up in the passion of their communal identities. From infancy, most of us carry within us a sense of "basic trust" (Erikson) that lets us experience 'inside' and 'outside' as an interrelated goodness. This basic trust is conveyed wordlessly through the mother as she mediates the infant's experience of the world, her positive reactions, in turn, expanding her baby's realm of trust in the outside world and its ability to cope with what is felt as alien and frightening inside. This is the 'good' mother, the effulgent face of the great mother-goddess, of the fair Durga, inclined graciously towards the infant with a faint smile on her lips. But when the mother is unempathic, anxious or rejecting, the terrible, dark visage of Kali appears, a goddess we must revere so that she refrains from destroying us. Kali deepens the infant's mistrust in the world, raises the specter of inner disintegration as all that is alien to the ego threatens to cut loose. As communal identity, with its propensity for violence and persecution anxiety, takes hold, the individual's "background of safety" (Gampel, 1997) is breached, the secure maternal presence recedes, and all that is alien, inside and outside, comes together through projection. In such situations, projection is not only an attempt at ridding the mind of destructive elements but also giving the world a familiar, even if frightening, form (Cohen,

1998). The projection is not an idiosyncratic, individual process but directed by the group, especially the demagogues who take the lead in creation of a menacingly familiar, old enemy. The demagogue, whether Hindu or Muslim, is loath to acknowledge any similarity and focuses only on the differences which, he seeks to persuade those still unconvinced, are of stubborn emotional importance.

“It was the believers in the Qur’an who taught you(the Hindus) graces of life, taught you how to eat and drink. All you had before us were tomatoes and potatoes. What did you have? We brought jasmine, we brought frangipani. We gave the Taj Mahal, we gave the red Fort. India was made India by us. We lived here for eight hundred years and we made India shine... you have dimmed its light and ruined the country. A beggar will not be grateful if made an emperor. Lay out a feast for him and he will not like it. Throw him a piece of bread in the dust and he will get his appetite back. Do not force us to speak out. Do not force us to come in front of you as an enemy.

God, look at their ignorance to believe we have no words

When out of pity we gave them the power of speech.” (Kakar, 1996)

The Hindu demagogue retorts:

“How can unity ever come about? The Hindu faces this way, the Muslim the other. The Hindu writes from left to right, the Muslim from right to left. The Hindu prays to the rising sun, the Muslim faces the setting sun when praying. If the Hindu eats with the right hand, the Muslim with the left. If the Hindu calls India ‘Mother’, she becomes a witch for the Muslim The Hindu worships the cow, the Muslim attains paradise by eating beef. The Hindu keeps a moustache, the Muslim always shaves the upper lip. Whatever the Hindu does, it is the Muslim’s religion to do its opposite. I say, ‘If you want to do everything contrary to the Hindu, then the Hindu eats with his mouth; you should do the opposite in this matter too!’”(Kakar, 1996)

Moralities of Violence.

The large scale replacement of personal identities by a communal identity in the time of Kali does not mean that people are now in some regressed, primitive state where the violent side of human nature is bound to be unleashed when they collect together in a procession or a congregation in demonstration of this identity. This essentially Freudian postulate needs to be seen in the context of a particular period in history—Europe between the two World Wars—when extremist ideologues of the Left and Right were creating mass movements imbued with messianic fervor. Building on the classic notions of crowds described by Gustave Le Bon (whose own ideas, in turn, were framed by the dread French upper classes felt in relation to revolutionary masses), Freud’s reflections on mass psychology were not free of the ideological concerns of his time, namely the liberal fear of the loss of individual autonomy in a collectivity and the socialist concern with how to make a desired collectivity tolerable and tolerant.

The replacement of personal by communal identity only means its refocusing, of the individual now acting according to the norms of the communal Hindu or Muslim group. For instance, in the time of Kali, there is a very different code of morality—not its absence—that governs the actions of both Hindus and Muslims. In both groups, arson, looting and killing men of the other community are no longer the serious transgressions they would be in times of peace. Yet, among both Hindus and Muslims, there is a consensual condemnation of rape and killing of women of the other community. Even in the time of Kali, the two communities in Hyderabad shared in common the commandments ‘Thou shall not kill... a woman’ and ‘Thou shalt not rape’, although the intensity of outrage associated with the transgression of these commandments varies with and within the communities (Kakar, 1996). Both communities view a riot as a battle exclusively between men in defense of the honor of their “nations”. Although regrettable accidents may occur, the women are noncombatants. Weak and vulnerable, they are entitled to protection, even by men of the enemy host.

In Hyderabad, then, the tradition of violence between the religious communities, the almost annual blood-letting, has developed certain norms which strongly disapproves of rape as a vehicle of contempt, rage or hatred that one community may feel for the other. Moreover, unlike some other ethnic/religious conflicts, such as the one in Bosnia, Hindus and Muslims still have to live together after a riot, carry out a minimal social and considerable economic interaction. Rape makes such interactions impossible and turns Hindu-Muslim animosity into implacable hatred. Like nothing else, it draws impermeable boundaries between the groups, separates them in an enmity where there is no longer a bridge between the two.

Not that there are no rumors or even stray incidents of sexual violence. Accounts of sexual violence during a riot, though, are almost always highly exaggerated. They seem to be necessary heralds of Kali’s birth. Beside the shared expression of moral outrage which strengthens the identification with the community, the rumors of sexual violence (especially of gang rape and sexual mutilation of women) also serve for the release and vicarious satisfaction of sadistic impulses. The time of Kali gives men permission for the fantasized fulfilment of the urge to utterly subjugate a woman, to reduce her consciousness to a reactivity of the flesh alone.

At an emotionally more neutral level, Hindus and Muslims also share a common disapproval of acts which hurt the religious sentiments of the other community. Such acts as throwing the carcass of a pig in a mosque or that of a cow in a Hindu temple, archetypal precipitating incidents for a riot in the sense that there is an unarticulated expectation that such an incident should belong to the beginning of an account of a Hindu-Muslim riot even if it did not actually take place, draw condemnation even at times when communal identities are rampant. This disapproval is often couched in terms of empathy: ‘Their religious feelings are the same as ours and we would not like it if it were done to us.’ The existence of this empathy, even in the time of Kali,

prevents a complete dehumanization of the 'enemy', from a Hindu or Muslim considering the other as subhuman.

The Killers Among Us.

Most people, of course, do not take part in the actual violence during a riot which is generally the province of certain young men (and older veterans) of the community although everyone--man, woman, child--will pitch in when their house or neighborhood is being attacked by a mob. Almost everyone, though, is an accessory—if not an accomplice-- to the murders, arson and looting committed by their own community's "soldiers." For in the poor neighborhoods where they live, there are not too many who would go along with the characterization of the killers as *goondas* (i.e. thugs) by the police and upper middle class sentiment. Loosely organized in gangs, many of their leaders, who are trained wrestlers(*pehlwan*), earn the bulk of their income from involvement in the distillation and selling of illegal liquor and from what they delicately describe as 'land business.'

Baldly stated, 'land business' is an outcome of India's hopelessly clogged legal system. Since landlord-tenant disputes as well as other disputes about land and property can take well over a decade to be sorted out if a redress of grievance is sought through the courts, the *pehlwan* is approached by one of the parties to the dispute to evict or otherwise intimidate the opposing party. The dispute being thus 'settled', the *pehlwan* receives a considerable fee for his services. In case of well-known *pehlwans* with a large supply of young toughs as their all-purpose assistants, land business can be very profitable. Many do not need to use strong-arm methods any longer. The mere fact that a well-known *pehlwan* has been engaged by one of the parties is enough for the opponent to back down and reach a settlement to the dispute. In some cases, if the second party also employs a *pehlwan* to protect its interests, the two *pehlwans* generally get together and reach a mutually satisfactory solution which, because of the fear they arouse, they can impose on their clients. Violence occurs only when a *pehlwan* tries to muscle into someone else's territory.

Before the independence of the country in 1947, the wrestlers, Hindu or Muslim, were traditionally patronized by Indian princes who had court wrestlers just as they had court painters or musicians. Although some politicians tried to replace the princes as patrons of wrestling gymnasiums after independence, using them for strong-arm methods to achieve political ends, in general the wrestler had lost the elevated view of his calling. It is in the polarization of Hindus and Muslims and in the context of religious revivalism that the wrestler is again finding a role as an icon of the community's physical power and martial prowess. Although he is still often used by the politician, the wrestler can again hold a moral high ground and be proud of his new role as 'protector of the Muslim (or Hindu) nation.'

It is these *pehlwans* and their gangs of young toughs who take the lead in the killings. They look upon a riot as a battle, an outbreak of hostilities in a long simmering war

where the killings do not involve moral qualms or compunctions. On the contrary, to kill under such circumstances is a moral duty higher than the patriotism of a soldier serving a modern nation-state since killing of members of the other community in a riot is in service of the nation of one's faith. Through an arsenal of ideational and ritual symbols, the violence becomes imbued with religious ultimacy. Indeed, the violence in Hindu-Muslim conflict should no longer be called a riot, with the anarchical connotations of the word. Less planned than a battle yet more organized than a riot, communal violence lies somewhere between the two. Unlike wars, where victory or defeat is related to the gain or loss of territory, victory in a riot is conceived of in terms of killing more of the enemy than the lives lost by your own community. The *pehlwan*s are surprisingly matter of fact, claiming they have never experienced any kind of blood-lust even during the worst course of communal violence. One of them stated his attitude toward mutual slaughter as follows: "Riots are like one-day cricket matches where the killings are the runs scored. You have to score at least one more run than the opposing team. The whole honor of your nation depends on not scoring less than the other team." (Kakar, 1996) After the riot, when the communal identities begin to recede, their common economic interests reassert themselves. As a Hindu *pehlwan* remarked about his interactions with a well-known Muslim one: "A few days after the riot is over, whatever the bitterness in our hearts and however cold our voices are initially, Akbar *pehlwan* has still to call me and say, 'Mangal bhai ('brother'), what do we do about that disputed land in Begumpet?' And I still have to answer, 'Let's get together on that one, Akbar *bhai*, and solve the problem peacefully.'" (Kakar, 1996)

The *pehlwan*s also like to maintain a tight discipline on the violence in their own areas even if they are not always successful, sending their toughs to disperse any mob that might collect spontaneously. Their warrior identities not only emphasize their view of themselves as soldiers in service of their faith but also a complete professionalism in the business of killing. As one of the younger toughs bragged: "There is a way to kill with a knife. Once I stab I do not need to turn and look back. I am sure the man is dead even as he is falling." (Kakar, 1996). This professional identity is exemplified by an apocryphal story about Sufi *pehlwan* who retired from the killing business after the 1979 riot. He is reported to have felt that like everything else in the country, riots, too, were not what they once used to be. Since each one of us interprets the world from the limited view we have of it, Sufi *pehlwan* too saw the deterioration of the country through his particular professional lens. The quality of food and thus the toughness of men's bodies had been steadily degenerating over the years. Bones had become brittle so that when one stabbed a person there was hardly any resistance to the knife blade which sliced through muscle, cartilage and bone as if they were wet clay. Simply put, there was no longer any professional satisfaction to be obtained from a riot, and Sufi had turned to other, more challenging, if perhaps less exciting pursuits.

Killers in the service of their religious communities, the *pehlwans* do not fit easy psychological or philosophical categories. There is no evidence, for instance, that they are psychopaths brutally trained to reject human feeling, are sexually insecure or were abused as children. Endowed with leadership qualities and standing out from their milieu in certain aspects of their character, they are not—as in Hannah Arendt’s ‘banality of evil’ hypothesis—perfectly ordinary people with the capacity to behave as monsters. In fact, the psychological profile of six *pehlwans* obtained through The Giessen Test (Beckman, Braehler and Richter, 1991), showed a striking similarity to the average psychological profile of chief executives, the C.E.Os, of large European and Indian business organizations (Kets de Vries, Kakar, 2000).

Conclusion

In concentrating on the causes of violence between religious/ethnic groups, academic discourse has generally tended to ignore the actual violence itself. The psychological states of individuals involved in the process of violence has received insufficient attention. Taking a case study of Hindu-Muslim violence, I have tried to map out the psychological shift that occurs when peaceful religious identities come to be replaced by violent “communal” ones. This shift, initiated by certain actual events, brings to fore a version of history which emphasizes conflict rather than coexistence between the groups. The establishment of an inherently violent communal identity is decisively propelled by religious-political demagogues who stoke persecution anxiety and by the circulation of rumors which further activate the paranoid potential through the imagery of the body in imminent danger of extinction. With the establishment of the primacy of the communal identity, a new morality that sanctions arson, looting and killing of the male members of the enemy group takes hold. The actual violence, however, especially the killings, generally remains the province of “professionals” who view themselves as soldiers in defense of the community’s faith.

Every time violence between religious groups occurs in India or in some other part of the subcontinent, the reach and spread of modern communications ensure that a vast number of people are soon aware of the incident. Each riot and its aftermath raise afresh the issue of an individual’s identification with his religious group and bring it up to the surface of consciousness. This awareness may be fleeting for some, last over a period of time for others, but the process is almost always by a pre-conscious self-interrogation on the significance of the religious community for one’s sense of identity and the intensity of emotion with which this community is invested. For varying periods of time, individuals consciously experience their identity through their religious group rather than through groups based on caste, language, region or occupation and are thus susceptible to the expression of what I have called a “communal” identity. The duration of this period, or even whether there will be a permanent change in the mode of identity experience for some who will henceforth encase themselves in the armor of an aggressive communal identity, depends on

many factors, not the least on the success of revivalist and fundamentalist political groupings in encouraging such a switch. From my study in poverty stricken neighborhoods of Hyderabad, with a long history of riots between the religious groups and the presence of all the conditions for violence—economic, political, historical, demographic, social-psychological--, it was encouraging to see how many Hindus and Muslims have continued to resist a permanent identity switch, returning to their traditional religious identity and its morality once the violence was over and the time of Kali had passed.

Author:

Sudhir Kakar is Indian psychoanalyst and writer of international standing. Trained at the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt, Germany. He teaches at various prestigious universities in India, Europe and the U.S.A.. Has written numerous essays and novels that have appeared in numerous languages, among which are: *The Colours of Violence*, *Infanzia e mondo interno in India*. *Uno studio psicoanalitico sull'infanzia e la società in India*, *Sesso e amore in India*, *Sciamani, mistici e dottori*, *Estasy*, *Gli Indiani*, *Mira e Mahatma*, and a joint publication with Catherine Clément: *La folle e il santo*.

e- mail: kathasudhir@hotmail.com

Translated by Lida Patrizia Cancrini Pini